

THE BOOK OF JAMES

by Rick Shoemaker

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JAMES, THE MAN

James was the half-brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55). James, like his brothers and sisters, did not believe Jesus was the Messiah (Jn. 7:5). Only after Jesus' resurrection did he believe (Acts 1:14). Paul tells us James saw Jesus after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). Perhaps seeing Jesus alive was the reason for his conversion.

James became a leader of the early church and was vital in its growth and development (Acts 15:13-21).

James was called "James the Just" because of his godly lifestyle. He was called "camel knees" because his knees were calloused from his much praying. How our modern churches could use such a man.

He died in AD 62.

JAMES, THE MESSAGE

WHEN DID JAMES WRITE THIS BOOK?

This book was probably the first New Testament book to be written. The Jerusalem Council took place in A.D. 50. Since that Council is not mentioned in this book, it was probably written before that date. Most likely, about AD 45-50.

TO WHOM DID JAMES WRITE THIS BOOK?

It was written to the "*twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*" (Jam. 1:1). He wrote to Christians who were suffering for their faith.

WHY DID JAMES WRITE THIS BOOK?

He wrote to encourage the Jewish believers who had been scattered because of persecution (Jam.1:1).

James teaches us about a God who never makes a mistake. Yes, we will suffer in this world. Yes, God could keep trials from coming. Yes, there will be times when there is no explanation. But, always, God does right.

James is a "show me" book. He does not deal as much about how to become a Christian as he does how to be a Christian. James was a man who loved people. He longed to see Christians growing and developing. Much of this book is written with that goal in mind.

This book hits hard. You cannot read it without coming away with a spiritual bloody nose and a black eye. It has been greatly misunderstood because of James' point of view about the Christian life. James talks about the practical side of living for God. He teaches that if we are really saved, it will be proven by how we live.

The book of James may seem contrary to Paul's writing, but when rightly understood, it agrees completely with the apostle's writing. Paul teaches how we are saved by grace through faith, and not of works (Eph. 2:8-9). James teaches we will have works if we are really saved (Jam. 2:18). James is a perfect example of what Paul wrote where he says that those who are saved are created "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10).

We could certainly entitle this book, "IT'S TIME TO GROW UP". James admonishes us to stop acting like children and to mature in the faith. He will tell us to be doers of the word, and not hearers only (Jam. 1:22). He teaches how the bible should change our lives. It should make us different.

His message still rings true today. Could I say along with our brother James, it is indeed time for us to grow up. Jesus told his disciples there was a lot he wanted to tell them but they were not mature enough to understand it (Jn. 16:12). Paul dealt with this type of problem (1 Cor. 3:2). The writer of Hebrews said they should have known enough to be teachers, but they were still needing to be taught themselves (Heb. 5:12).

Are you mature enough to dig into the Word of God and let it feed you? We are in trouble if all we get is what the preacher gives us. That is why there are so many Christians who are spiritually weak, sickly, and afraid.

Being a baby is fine if you are a baby. However, if we are still acting like a baby when we are twenty years old, there is a problem. And, it is a problem that needs to be dealt with.

Babies' lives involve pouting, pacifiers, playpens, potties, pampers, and puke. A normal day with a baby will include bibs, bassinets, blankies, booties, buggies, burps, bottles, and even boogers. I don't know about you, but that is not what I want for my spiritual life. I want to grow up.

If you still have to be given a bottle, you are a baby. If you think you are the only one who matters, you are a baby. If you expecting someone else to make you happy, you are a baby. If you throw a tantrum when things don't go your way, you are a baby. If you are easily offended, you are a baby. If you fall down a lot, you are a baby. If you are cutest when you are asleep, you are a baby.

There is one more thing that is true of a baby. They are growing and maturing. Could I say again, it is all right to be a baby, but it is not all right to stay a baby. We should be grown up enough to deal with the issues of life. Unfortunately, the average Christian is no closer to having victory than the first day they were saved.

James was written to change that. He teaches us that it is time to quit acting like toddlers. It is indeed TIME TO GROW UP. Are you ready for the challenge? If you are, get ready for your life to change.

1. SUFFERING IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 1:1-17

James is writing to people who are suffering. But, instead of coddling them, he lets them know that God is trying to use that suffering to help them mature spiritually.

SUFFERING INVOLVES TRIALS 1:1-2

Jas 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

In James' day, those writing a letter would identify themselves at the beginning of the letter.

James called himself "*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*" He did not lay his claim to fame by calling himself the brother of Jesus Christ. That tells us a lot about this man. He was not looking for the limelight. He wanted his life to bring glory to God.

A servant has one, and only one, responsibility. That is, he is supposed to obey his master. That is all he does. A good servant obeys his master all the time. He obeys when it is easy, and when it is difficult. He obeys when he wants to, and when he doesn't want to. He obeys when he understands why the master is doing what he is doing, or when he has no idea what the master is doing. He simply obeys. So should we.

A servant obeys his master because he knows his master has the right to make demands of him. That is why he is called "master". Our Lord has the right to make demands of us. After all, they don't call Him "GOD" for nothing.

James said he is "*a*" servant of God. He is only one, but he is one. One person totally surrendered to God, can do great things for the cause of Christ. After all, Moses was just one man. So was Abraham, David,

Joseph, Elijah, Daniel, Paul, and even Jesus. Also, one person can do a lot to harm the cause of Christ. Adam was one man, so was Jezebel, Ahab, Herod, and Judas. Never, ever, underestimate the power of one.

Notice how this verse says, "*a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ*". The wording of this phrase teaches us that Jesus is God. He is as much God, as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

James was writing to a group of believers who had fled their homes because of persecution. They were quite literally, "*scattered abroad*". They left everything they loved behind. Jesus had warned his disciples about the coming persecution (Mt. 5:11-12). The book of Acts records it (Acts 4:18; 5:26-29; 7:54-60; 8:1; 9:1-2; 9:14).

The word "*scattered*" means "dispersion". To them, it seemed like the devil had driven them away from their home. In actuality, God was dispersing them across the countryside to proclaim the gospel message.

Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

James refers to his readers as, "*brethren*". He lets them know they are family. By doing so, he is saying, we are in this trouble together. He is telling those who he is writing to, you may feel alone, but you aren't.

One thing that will help us get through our times of suffering is realizing we are not alone. Paul said temptation and trials are common to man (1 Cor. 10:13). That means there is someone who understands. There is someone who really cares about you and what you are going through. That helps.

One of the greatest needs of any church is someone who will recognize when someone is hurting. Our churches are full of hurting people and someone needs to reach out to these suffering saints. A kind word can do more than you realize. Why don't you ask the Lord to show you someone who needs a friend? You can make a difference. You may not change the world, but you can make a difference for someone.

The word "*count*" means "to consider". It has the idea of adding up all the numbers and determining the result. To determine the total of a mathematical equation, we add certain numbers, and we subtract certain numbers. Then, we come to a conclusion. James is saying when we add up all the circumstances of our lives, we will always come out with a positive conclusion. Even the negatives are positives in the life of a Christian because God is working. Paul had the same idea in mind when he said, "*all things work together for good*" (Rom. 8:28)

That is why he says we are to count it "*joy*" When we recognize the good that trials can produce in us, it should bring us joy. Jesus did the same when he hung on the cross (Heb. 12:2).

The word "*joy*" means "delight". We are not to just endure our battles, we are to count it joy. We may occasionally go through a battle without complaining excessively. But, how often do we delight about our trials?

James says we are to count it "*all*" joy. This means, nothing but joy. It means an unmixed joy. Not some joy mingled with grief, but all joy. We are not to even consider the pain, or the loss, that comes through trials. Those things are temporal and should not a concern to us who are eternal.

The word "*temptations*" is a word that means "trials" or "test". It also means "solicitation to sin". The context of the Scripture determines which way it is being used. In verses 2-10, James is using this word to describe the trials these Christians are enduring. In verses 12-16, he will use it to describe their temptation to do wrong.

Every trial can become a temptation if we mishandle it. There will always be the temptation to do wrong when problems come our way. James was writing to people who knew what it was to suffer for their faith. The early church was imprisoned, beaten, and many died. No doubt, they were tempted to do wrong during their trials.

The twenty-first century American Christian may not be persecuted, but we do have our battles to endure. So, the truths found in the book of James certainly apply to us.

The word, "*fall*" is the same word we find describing the man who "*fell*" among thieves in the Good Samaritan parable (Lk. 10:31). It has the idea of being surrounded by trials. There are times when it seems like trouble is attacking us from all directions.

The word "*divers*" means "various". We face a variety of trials. The Lord knows what is going to work on us. He will send exactly what we need and that which will do the best job to develop us.

Notice also, James did not say "if" you have a trial. It isn't "if", it is "when" we have trials. Peter said we should not think it strange when these trials come (1 Pe 4:12-13).

Jas 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

This verse tells us that God sends trials to show us what kind of faith we have.

The word "*knowing*" has the idea of being sure. This is something where there is no doubt. We can be sure that the trials we face are meant for God's glory and our good.

The word, "*trying*" means "to test". A test tells us about ourselves. A math test in school told us what we knew about math. The tests the Lord sends us through are meant to tell us about our spiritual condition.

We cannot determine our true spiritual condition when everything is running smoothly in our lives. Anyone can be spiritual when things are going well. I have a preacher friend who says he is the best Christian on earth, as long as he is getting his way. We should measure our spiritual condition when everything is falling apart.

A test not only reveals what we are, but it also tells us how we need improvement. If I make a 50 on a math test, I know I need to study a lot more than I have been. The test tells me what I need to do. So it is with the tests God sends us through. They are to help us to learn where we are and to encourage us to do better.

It is our "*faith*" that is tried. Do you have genuine faith? Do you have the type of faith that can endure the worse of trials? Someone has said, the faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted.

When our faith is tried, it produces the fruit of patience. The word James used for "*patience*" is more than what we usually think of. This word is speaking of enduring trials with cheerfulness.

The word "*worketh*" means "to accomplish" or "to cause". James tells us it is the trials in our lives that will "accomplish" or "cause" patience. Paul said the same thing (Rom. 5:3). Our trials provide an opportunity to gain spiritual strength and maturity.

SUFFERING INVOLVES TRAINING 1:4

Jas 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

The trials we face are meant to train us how to live godly during difficult times.

Many people avoid the subject of patience because they know patience comes by trials in our lives. Many people, even preachers, say that we should never pray for patience.

The problem with that type of thinking is, we all desperately need patience. We must remember, God is very much in control of His work on us. He will never do more than what is needed to accomplish the work He is attempting to do in us. We may overreact, but God does not. God never goes overboard. We can trust Him.

We are to "*let patience have her perfect work*". In other words, James tells us to surrender to the work God is trying to accomplish in us. It will be worth it in the end.

What a blessing it is to have God produce in us a faith that can endure the worse of trials. Do you not long to be able to endure your trials with joy? Would it not be wonderful to live in victory? I echo what the old gospel preacher said, "Lord, do a thorough job on me, and don't quit working on me just because I whine".

The words, "*perfect and entire*" have the idea of being complete or mature. It means God has been able to do all He wants to do in us, and we have become exactly what He wants us to be. What a blessing that would be. But, this is accomplished only by us going through trials and enduring them faithfully.

Some have said the words, "*perfect and entire, wanting nothing*" refer to the type of animal that God approved for the sacrifices offered to Him. These sacrifices had to be without flaw (Dt. 17:1). The Priest would examine, or test, the animal to make sure it was suitable to be sacrificed. If any flaw or blemish was found the lamb would not be sacrificed. Through trials, God is attempting to remove our blemishes.

The words, "*wanting nothing*" sums it up. It means nothing lacking. What a blessing it would be to reach a level of spirituality to where we lacked nothing. And, this is the goal God is working toward in us.

Perhaps this can be summed up by saying, we will be like Christ. He endured the trials without complaint. He faced horrible treatment but never deviated from the Father's plan. He "*set his face*" to go to Jerusalem knowing he would end up on the cross (Lk. 9:51).

God desires to make our faith strong. When we surrender and allow the Lord to work in us we will not lack what we need to face whatever comes our way. Would you not love to know that you have what it takes to face any trial that comes?

When God gives us the grace to endure a trial, we should give Him the glory. Peter talked about this (1 Pet. 1:7). If you were victorious through the trial it was because He gave you strength that was not your own. By the way, when He carries you through a trial, do not forget to thank Him.

None of this will be accomplished if we do not respond to our trials in the right manner. It is bad enough to have to endure difficulties, to begin with. But, how much worse are those trials when we do not learn the lesson God is trying to teach us? How many times have we had to go through the same trial again because we did not learn the lesson the first time?

SUFFERING INVOLVES TRUST 1:5-12

God sends trials that we might learn to trust Him. Anyone can trust God when the sun is shining. He wants us to trust Him when we are facing the worse storm of our lives. God wants us to know that we can trust Him even when we do not understand what He is doing. We need the attitude of Job. He said, "*When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*". He knew God was doing a good work in him.

Jas 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

James said if you, "*lack wisdom*", ask God for it. Wisdom is simply having good common sense. It is knowing what is best and how to attain it.

The "*wisdom*" James is talking about here is the ability to know what to do during our afflictions. If we ever need wisdom it is when we are in the furnace of affliction. We dare not act on our own when facing troubles. We will almost always do the wrong thing. It is bad enough to have the trials to deal with, but when we make wrong decisions while in a trial, it makes matters worse.

The first step to gaining the wisdom is to realize we need it. Oh, how we need wisdom concerning the trials we face every day. What is God doing? Why did He send it? What is He trying to accomplish? What should I do? How do I handle this without falling apart? And most important, how can I honor God in this trial?

So, James says to us all, "*let him ask of God*". If we hope to have wisdom we must go to the source of all wisdom. Only God can give true wisdom. We are quick to go to man. We look to the ones who have been educated or trained. God certainly can use well trained, Christian, counselors to help us. But, the wisdom we need during trials must be godly wisdom. God tells us to come to Him. If we go to man's philosophy in our search for help we will be disappointed and misled. Paul warned about the "*vain babblings*" (1 Tim. 6:20-21). He told Timothy to avoid them because they would cause them to err from the faith.

We can trust God to give us this wisdom. James says God, "*giveth to all men liberally*". We can ask in confidence expecting God to hear. God does not send us into a trial without giving us what we need to bear it. We can believe that even in the darkest hour. Proverbs says, "*For the LORD giveth wisdom*" (Pro. 2:6).

The word "*liberally*" means "generously". We have a God with open hands. He is not stingy with His grace. God will give us enough, and more than enough. He has what it takes for us to get through any trial.

God will give this wisdom to "*all*" men. God's wisdom is available to any and all. It is not reserved for the elite or the special. It is for anyone who desires it.

God never gets upset when we ask Him for wisdom. James says, He "*upbraideth not*". God never chides us. He does not rebuke us. He does not scold us. He does not humiliate His child. He never says, "What is wrong with you, you should have already learned this".

And so we see one of the reasons why trials are so valuable. Our trials show us how much we need God. Were it not for the trials, we would wander through life thinking we do not need God's help.

Do not despair if your trials drive you to your knees. They are meant to. One of the reasons why God sent them was to make you realize how weak you are and how much you need His help. The person who wrestles with God when in trouble, will find Him very able to help (cf. Gen. 32:24).

Jas 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

James told us in verse five that God's wisdom is available to "*all*". But, he makes it clear in this verse that it comes only to those who ask in faith. If we are going to ask God for wisdom, we need to "*ask in faith*". As with all our requests of God, we need to believe He will give us what we are asking for. Our faith moves God.

We can rest assured, God wants to give us wisdom. He does not want us to be defeated. He wants us to understand what He is doing. He wants us to get the full benefit of the trial. If anyone wants us to do the

right thing, it is God. He wants to show us the way through the trial. He will guide us through every step of the valley. Our God knows the way through the wilderness.

But, we need to ask in faith, "*nothing wavering*". There is no reason for doubt when we ask our Father. John said we can come with confidence, knowing that He hears us (1 Jn. 5:14). This means that we are to believe as we pray. We are to pray in faith. If we ask for nothing we will get it every time.

We don't think about it often, but it breaks God's heart for us to ask Him for something and then doubt if He is going to give it to us. James gives an excellent illustration of the person who prays without faith. He is like "*a wave of the sea*" that is "*driven*" by the wind. It gets pushed around a lot but accomplishes little.

The wave is "*tossed*". The picture James is painting is not of one wave that flows toward the shore. That type of wave has some stability about it. It is moving in one direction. It has power. But, the type of wave James speaks of is the type that is out in the ocean when there is a storm. That type of wave is tossed back and forth, first one direction, and then another. It has no stability and it finds no rest. And neither does the heart of the one who doubts God. They believe one minute and doubt the next.

Jas 1:7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

If we ask lacking faith, we will not receive. It should not shock us if heaven is silent. If we do not ask expecting an answer, we have left out the most important ingredient, that being faith. I wonder how much time we waste as we pray in doubt. I wonder how much we miss because of doubt. The reason the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years was because of their doubt. They refused to believe God.

Jas 1:8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

The word "*double*" means "vacillating". It has the idea of going back and forth. The doubter is like the wave James just mentioned. One minute, he is believing, the next he is doubting. He never really gets settled either way. Doubt doesn't just affect our prayer life, it affects our entire life. It makes our entire life unstable.

Jas 1:9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

James deals with those "*of low degree*". No doubt he is talking to those who have lost so much because of the persecution. Since these believers had fled their homes and jobs many of them had become poverty-stricken as a result. James tells them, and us, if God has seen fit to bless (exalt) you should not forget who did it. We should never take His blessings for granted.

God cannot trust everyone with His blessings. Many devour His blessing and forget who gave them. When man begins to prosper, they turn quickly away from God. We should appreciate His goodness and honor Him with what He has given us. Don't take it for granted, don't think you deserve it and don't think you earned it.

Jas 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

Remember, James is writing to some people who have lost everything. Some of them were rich before the persecution came. He says, if those who had been rich are "*made low*" they should thank the Lord for it.

We ought to be thankful for the circumstances that break us. God desires to bring His children to a state of humility. Pride has no place in the life of any saint. It may take losing our possessions to become humble. So, whichever way your life goes, rejoice. If God sees fit to exalt you, rejoice. If He sees fit to bring you low, rejoice anyway.

We should rejoice always because life is short. Like the flower of the grass we "shall pass away". What difference does it make what we have on earth? None of us will be here long. Our lives are like the grass that withers quickly. Peter said, "*For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass*" (1 Pet. 1:24).

Jas 1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

The beauty and fragrance of the "*flower*" is wonderful. But, it doesn't last long. The sun rises, the grass is withered, and the flower drops off. That which was beautiful about the grass is soon gone. The rich man will be like the grass. The riches he loved so dearly is temporary at best. That which he loved and lived for will perish. Proverbs says, "*For riches make themselves wings*" (Pro. 23:5b).

James is trying to remind us that nothing in this world will last. If we have everything in this world and don't have God, we have nothing. We should live for that which is eternal.

So, in verses 9 through 11, James is telling those who are low to remember their high position in Christ. And, he is telling those who are high to remember they are nothing without the Lord. If the poor saint will forget their poverty, and the rich saint will forget their riches, both will be better off.

We all want an easy and quick way to the top. But, God says the best place is the bottom. Dear friend, you may be low now, but that does not mean that God has forgotten you. If you are His child, He loves you, He

knows what is best. Trust Him, love Him, obey Him.

Thus far, James has told us to count it joy when we go through trials. He has told us to allow the Lord to do His work in us through our trials. He has encouraged us to ask God for wisdom and to simply trust Him. But, our natural tendency towards trials is not to count it joy or trust God. The thing that comes naturally is to complain, get angry, doubt God, and to do what is wrong. Our flesh does not like the pain of suffering. However, trials are necessary. If you have ever experienced the touch of God in the midst of your trials you understand why James said to count it joy. We can have joy in the midst of heartache, peace while in a storm, and strength in our times of weakness. That is the grace of God, and I thank Him for it.

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

James starts this verse with good news, "*Blessed is the man*". We all want to be blessed and James tells us we can be. But, as we are about to discover, there is a condition to this blessing. But, I promise you, if we meet this condition, it will be worth it.

The word "*blessed*" means "fortunate". It is talking about being blessed "by God". It is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes (Mt. 5:2-12). We usually associate blessings with profit, health, benefits, and promotion. But, God says the way to blessings is through trials.

This blessing is not promised to all believers. It is not promised to all who have trials. It is promised only to those who endure. The word, "*endureth*" means, "to stay under". It has the idea of patiently enduring the trials that come our way. Usually, the first thing we think of is trying to escape our trials. But, God wants us to endure them.

The word "*endureth*" tells us that there will be times when our trials will be severe. However, God can and will give us the grace to endure (1 Cor. 10:13; 15:57).

Also, the word "*endureth*" makes me think of the fact that the trial is going to end. To endure means to bear up till the end. Thank the Lord, the time will come when the trial will be over. The individual trials we face come to an end. The sickness ends, the bill is paid, the problem gets fixed.

But, this also reminds us of the day when all of our trials will be over. The end of all trials will come. All of our problems will be behind us. All the heartache, all the pain, all the suffering, will be over, forever.

Stay true dear saint. The trial will soon be over. As the Psalmist said, "*weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (Ps. 30:5).

When "*he is tried*" means there will come a time when we will be tested. At that time, God will reward those who endured their trials faithfully by giving them a "*crown of life*". When this person stands before the Lord they will be rewarded for being faithful in spite of suffering (Mt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

There are four other crowns mentioned in the bible. The crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8). The incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25-27). The crown of rejoicing (1 Th. 2:19-20). The crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

By no means, does this mean we have to earn our way to heaven. A crown is not salvation, it is a reward to the believers for their faithfulness. Salvation is a free gift (Eph. 2:8-9). Crowns are rewards to those who are faithful. Paul talked about crowns (1 Cor. 9:25-27). He was talking about those who participated in the athletic events of his day. Like the athletes that ran well, those who are faithful to the Lord will be rewarded. The crowns of the athletes were made of olive branches and faded quickly. Our crowns will last forever. I believe the day will come when we will be able to lay the crowns we won at Jesus' feet (Rev. 4:10-11). After all, if we will be so fortunate as to win a crown, it will be because of Him.

Resisting our fleshly desires may be difficult now. But, what we miss now will be nothing compared to what we will gain then (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). We will not regret what we may have "missed". May the Lord help us to live now like we will be glad we did when we stand before Him.

For the faithful child of God, the best is yet to come. Dear weary saint, your road may be difficult for now, but do not dismay, the best is yet to come. Stay true, keep standing, fight on, walk faithfully, and one day soon, you will be glad you did.

This blessing is "*promised*" to those who are faithful. I am so glad, that in a world where nothing is certain, there are some things we can be sure of. We need never doubt what God says.

This blessing is promised to those who "*love him*". We should stay faithful during hardships and temptations because we love Him. We may resist the flesh because we fear the consequences that come with falling. We may resist because of the fear of being discovered. We may resist because we do not want to suffer the chastisement from the Lord. But resisting sin because we love God is the greatest reason. If we truly love Him, how can we willingly do something that we know will hurt Him?

Even though the emphasis James makes is about the reward we will receive when we stand before the

Lord, we should not forget the fact that resisting temptation has a reward now. How about the joy of knowing we have pleased our Savior? What about the thrill of victory over the flesh and the devil? What about the power of God that is given to those who live godly lives? And, what about the fact that those who live godly are much more likely to see their prayers answered? Saying "no" to temptation is worth it, now and later.

Why would God send those who love Him through such trials and temptations? If they love Him, why would He not protect them from such hardships? James anticipates that question and answers it in verse thirteen.

SUFFERING INVOLVES TEMPTATION 1:13-15

In the next few verses, James is going to tell these suffering saints to not give in to temptation. When we suffer, there is always a tendency to do wrong. We are about to discover, a trial can become a temptation. It is easy to do wrong when your life is falling apart.

A perfect example of this is Job. God allowed the devil to attack Job like few others. Job's response is very enlightening. He said, "*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21).

Job responded correctly to his trials. But, the next verse is very important. It tells us Job did not sin, nor charge God foolishly. Job's trial had also become a temptation. Yet, Job did not sin.

The same was true for those whom James was writing to. They were being mistreated because of their walk with the Lord. Many of them had lost all they owned because they had to flee for their lives. How could their trial be turned into a temptation? To begin with, they could have been tempted to get angry at God. Also, they could have been tempted to get even with those who were mistreating them. They could have been tempted to steal from others to replace what they had lost. And finally, they could have been tempted to totally turn to a life of sin and forsake the Lord who had saved them.

Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

James now turns directly to the temptation side of our trials. He uses the verb form of the word temptation. He is speaking of the action of temptation.

Let no man say, "*I am tempted of God*". In other words, do not say God is tempting you.

God allows temptation but He never does the tempting. The devil tempts us, God tries us.

Someone may think God tempted Adam by pointing out the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No, God did not tempt Adam, He simply provided Adam with a choice. God did not want man to obey Him because he had no choice. He wanted man to obey because he loved Him. God told Adam to not partake of the tree, and He told him what would happen if he did (Gen. 2:16-17).

James tells us to not blame God if we are being tempted. Man always tries to blame someone else for his failures. It started with Adam. He said it was, "*The woman thou gavest to be with me*" (Gen. 3:12). He was trying to blame Eve, and God, for his sin.

James said, "*God cannot be tempted with evil*". God cannot be tempted with evil because there is no sin in Him. He is absolutely holy. You cannot tempt me with mayonnaise because I do not like it. I do not like the way it looks, smells, or tastes. Temptation can be real only if we desire that which we are being tempted with. God cannot be tempted with evil because there is no desire for evil in Him.

James continues by saying, "*neither tempteth he any man*". God cannot tempt anyone because His very nature makes it impossible. He is too holy.

The temptation to sin comes from the devil (Mt. 4:3), and from our flesh (Jam. 1:14; 1 Jn. 2:16), but never from God.

Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

James says "*every man is tempted*". None of us are excluded from temptation. If we think we are above being tempted we are doomed for failure. All of us have a nature that craves the things of this world. Our old nature was not changed when we got saved. It is still vile, it still wants the things of the world, and it still has no desire for the things of God. The person who says they no longer have a desire for sin is the person who is either deceived or lying.

We are "*drawn away*" by our own lust or desires. Our own desires have as much, or more, to do with temptation as the devil. Many of us have probably never even had an encounter with the devil himself.

Notice first, we are drawn away. We are drawn away from the will of God, from His blessings, and from His

peace, joy, power, contentment, and purpose. The tempter is trying to draw us away from God's will. He is trying to draw us away from that which is best. God's will is always, always, always, the best thing for us. But, the devil hates God and everything about Him. So, he tries to draw us away.

If we are being drawn away, that also means we are being drawn towards something. The devil draws us towards that which will please the flesh. But, the pleasure of sin leaves us empty. It does not provide joy. The pleasure sin produces is brief, then comes the agony of guilt and conviction. Sin is always followed by agony.

The word "*lusts*" means "longings" or "desires". In other words, the devil tempts us with exactly what our flesh wants.

The word "*own*" means "separate" or "private". It is speaking of a desire that is personally mine. The devil knows exactly what will be most likely to work on each of us. He studies us and knows where our weaknesses are. Then, he goes after our weakest spot. That is why he is so successful in his temptations.

The word "*enticed*" means "to seduce". Seduce means "to persuade". The devil persuades us to do what we know is wrong, what will break the heart of God, and what will rob us of our joy. He is an expert in deception.

Jas 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

James likens sin and lust to conception. Desire brings a man and woman together. The result is a conception and a birth. Our old nature desires the things in the world. When the thing we desire and our flesh get together, sin will be the result. For example, a drunk has an inner desire for alcohol and the neighborhood bar provides that which he desires. When the desire and the bar are united, sin is the result. Your inner desire may not be alcohol, but you have one. The devil will do all he can to unite your desire with that which tempts you.

The word, "*finished*", means "bring to completion". James is referring to the end result of sin. The end result of sin is always heartache and misery.

The result of sin "*bringeth forth death*". Sin never ends well. It always costs more than it is worth. We will always regret giving in to sin. When sin is not dealt with it leads to "*death*". In the case of a lost person, it is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). In the case of a saved person, it is the sin unto death (1 Jn. 5:16). Ananias and Sapphira are examples of this (Acts 5:1-11). Paul told the Corinthians that many had died because they violated the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:30). The person who takes sin lightly will soon discover how seriously God views it. He loves us, but He will not allow us to continue to defile His name.

One of the best examples of what James is saying is what happens to a fish when he sees a worm. That worm looks at the worm because it is in the fish's nature to desire worms.

The inner desire of the fish is drawn by the outward allurements of the worm. By the time he realizes there is a hook in the worm, it is too late. The devil's bait may look good to our flesh, but there is always a hook inside.

Since temptation arises from that which our flesh desires, the intelligent thing to do is to stay away from that which our flesh craves. It is like the little boy who climbed in the chair so he could get close to the cookie jar. His mother asked him what he was doing. He replied, "I'm fighting temptation". It is a lot easier to fight temptation when we stay away from the cookie jar.

Let's go back to my fish example. As difficult as it may be, the best thing the fish could do, is swim away from the worm as fast as he can. We are taught to flee from that which tempts us (Gen. 39:12; Pro. 2:16-19; Pro. 5:8; Pro. 6:24; 1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Before we move on, I need to say that the temptation itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted, and we know he had no sin. The temptation is simply an allurements. What we do with the temptation determines whether we sin or not.

Jas 1:16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

This verse connects the previous verses to the verses following. The previous verses dealt with loving the things our flesh desires. The following verses will deal with the good things that God gives. James gives us a contrast between what our flesh gives and what our Father gives.

The devil will deceive us into thinking that doing what the flesh desires will make us happy. We should always remember, the devil comes only to steal, kill, and to destroy (Jn. 10:10).

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

In this verse, James continues his contrast between what our flesh gives and what our Father gives. That bait looks good to the fish but it is deadly. What our Father gives has no hook in it.

God gives only "*good*" and "*perfect*" things. God is not only not the author of sin (v.15), he is the author of all that is good. Since He is good, only good things can come from Him.

Whether something is good or not can only be determined by its eternal value. A gift of a million dollars may seem to be good, but it may actually ruin us. Whereas, losing everything we own may end up being the best thing that ever happened to us. The Christians James is writing to were suffering terrible persecution. At first glance, that persecution did not seem to be a good thing, but God was working something good in them.

The two words, "*cometh down*" are from one Greek word that means "to descend". The Greek present tense of these words speaks of a continuous action. In other words, the good gifts from above keep coming and coming. The shower of His blessings never ceases.

James calls God, the "*Father of lights*". He is clearly using the sun in an attempt to describe God.

- As the sun is the source of light and heat, so is our Father the source of all good things

All that is good and pure comes from our heavenly Father. There is nothing good except that which comes from Him. Man cannot produce good. God said our best is like filthy rags to Him (Isa. 64:6). Even our, so-called, good deeds are evil because they come from within our fallen nature.

- As the sun always shines, so our God stays the same

There is "*no variableness*" in God. The word "*variableness*" means "change" or "variation". It literally means, "to be fickle". Our God is not fickle. He will always be holy, good, pure, and right. He never changes (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; Ps. 33:11; Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 6:17; Heb. 13:8). Circumstances do not affect Him. I am glad God never gets in a bad mood. His goodness is consistent because He is consistent.

- As the sun can be obscured by clouds, there may be times when God seems to be hidden to us

The sun is shining even when storm clouds disrupt our view. God is always there, even when we can't see Him.

As James refers to the similarities between God and the sun, he also refers to one difference. He talks about "*shadow of turning*". Because of the rotation of the earth the sun casts shadows. These shadows are constantly changing. But, this is not true of our God. He stays the same, all the time, no matter what.

2. SCRIPTURE IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 1:18-27

In the previous verses, James told us lust and sin produces death. In the following verses, James is telling us the Word and the Spirit produces life.

Remember, the theme of this book is spiritual growth. James is about to tell us how the Word of God is vital in our spiritual development. If we ever hope to grow up we must make much of the Word of God.

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING REDEEMED 1:18

Jas 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

God uses His Word to redeem the sinner. He "*begat*" us by His word of truth.

This verse is full of truth. It tells us salvation is like birth. We are birthed into the family of God when we get saved. We are literally born again (Jn. 3:7). It tells us God is the one who gives this life. Only God can give life. Only He can save the soul. It tells us that life comes by the Word of God (Jn. 5:24; Eph. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:23). If you are saved, somewhere, somehow, someone, told you the Word, and the Spirit of God convicted you. It tells us that God did this because He wanted to. He did it of His "*own will*". One of the grandest truths of scripture is the fact that God wants to forgive dirty, rotten, undeserving, sinners.

The word "*creatures*" means "created product". When God saves a lost person, He makes a new creation of them (2 Cor. 5:17). God recreates the unbeliever into a person who can do right instead of wrong. He wants to change our hearts from evil to good and make us fit for His service.

Believers are "*a kind of firstfruits*".

The word "*firstfruits*" should remind us of salvation. Remember, James is writing to Jews (Jam. 1:1). God came to the Jews first with the gospel. So, James is probably referring to the Jews as the firstfruits (Jn. 4:22; Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:7)

The word "*firstfruits*" should remind us of sanctification. The firstfruits were the first and best part of a harvest. The Old Testament believers were instructed to give the firstfruits to God (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:9-14;

Dt. 26:1-19). Like the Old Testament firstfruits, we should give our first and our best to the Lord.

And, the word "*firstfruits*" should remind us of glorification. The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest. Therefore, it was a promise that more was to follow. Believers are the firstfruits of God's new creation (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The day is coming when He will make all things new (Rev. 21:5). One day this recreation will become a reality. Until then, we groan in anticipation of its arrival (Rom. 8:22-23).

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING RIGHT 1:19-20

Jas 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

The word "*Wherefore*" ties what has been said with what is about to be said. James is saying since the Word of God has such power we should be quick to hear what it says.

The word, "*swift*" means "prompt". Believers should be quick to learn and live the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). We should be quick to hear the Word because it is God's Word. If he said it, we can believe it. We need to be quick to hear the Word because it is right. It is right all the time. Many try to deny the Word, but that does not change the fact that it is right.

We should be quick to listen to the Word of God because of its power. God's Word has the power to convert (1 Pe 1:23), to cut (Heb. 4:12), to cleanse (Ps. 119:11), to comfort (Ps 119:40,50,131), to caution (Ps 19:11), to cheer (Ps 119:28,62,70), to calm (Ps. 119:54), to counsel (Ps 119:98), to control (Ps 119:97,105), and to change (Ps. 119:93).

Those who try to criticize the Word do so in ignorance. The unsaved cannot understand it because it is spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). A lost person criticizing the bible is like a blind man who criticizes The Mona Lisa, or a deaf man who criticizes Bach. They do so in ignorance.

It is little wonder that David said, "*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*" (Ps. 119:18). He longed for the Word (Ps. 119:31,40). Can you say the same? Are you eager to hear the Word? Do you read the bible with an anticipation of hearing from God? Do you listen intently when the preacher preaches? I have often said we should listen to a preacher like we would listen to a lawyer reading the will of our rich uncle. Somewhere in those words, there is something for me and I do not want to miss it.

We are not only to be swift to hear, but we are to be "*slow to speak*". I am afraid we get this backward all too often. We should listen more than we speak and think before we speak. We should not only think before we speak, but we should also pray before we speak. There is much gain to listening quietly. There can be much damage by talking without thinking (Pro. 10:19; 13:3; 15:12).

This is true for every Christian but it is especially true of a preacher. Before we speak the Word we should be sure we know what the bible actually says. It would do every preacher and teacher well to let the thought of "*slow to speak*" burn in their hearts. We can get used to preaching the Word. We can go into the pulpit after little, or no, prayer. We can stand before dying people and deliver a dead message. May we guard against becoming so comfortable with the ministry of the Word. It would do us well to go back to the days when we were scared to death when we walked behind the pulpit. The preacher who has lost the shake in his knees before he preaches needs to listen to our brother James.

We are to be "*slow to wrath*". James connects slow to speak with slow to wrath. Those who are hasty to speak are usually hasty to get angry. A quick temper reveals an uncontrolled heart.

Jas 1:20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Our uncontrolled anger can never, ever, accomplish God's will. Jesus rebuked the disciples when they showed an unrighteous anger (Lk. 9:53-56).

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING RECEPTIVE 1:21-22

Jas 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

We should "*lay apart all filthiness*". The term "*lay apart*" is like taking off dirty clothes. It carries with it the idea of casting off. Paul taught the same (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1). So did Peter (1 Pet. 2:1). It gives the idea of aggressively throwing aside. It makes me think of taking off clothes that are so filthy you don't even think of trying to wash them. You throw them straight in the trash. We should be as aggressive in discarding the "filthy" things of our lives. We need to cast them aside never to indulge them again.

It is interesting to note that the word "*filthiness*" is from a compound of two Greek words that literally mean

ear wax. James is telling us to make sure our ears are clean so we can hear God clearly when He speaks.

The term, "*superfluity of naughtiness*" means, "abundance of wickedness". It is referring to the evil that abides in the heart and overflows into the life. Jesus said, "*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries*" (Mt. 15:19). What is in our well, will come up in our bucket.

Once we have laid aside all sin, we are to "*receive*" the Word of God. We cannot really receive the Word until we have laid aside those things that displease God. A sinful heart hinders us from really hearing the Word. We are to reject the things that lead us to do wrong and receive the Word which will lead us to do right.

We are to receive the Word in "*meekness*". In humility, we should open our hearts to the Word and allow it to do its work in us. Receiving the Word in meekness means we realize how desperately we need its message. It means we accept it as it is, the very Word of God. It also means we obey its instructions.

The fact that James tells us to receive the Word tells us we are able to reject it. God does not force us to walk by His instruction. But, if we reject it, we will suffer the consequences.

James says the Word is "*engrafted*". This has the idea of a seed being placed into the ground where it germinates and produces fruit. Only the Holy Spirit can place the seed of the Word into our hearts.

When James said the Word was "*able to save your souls*", he was not telling his readers they needed to be saved. He was trying to remind them how powerful the Word of God is. It has the power to convert a sinner. It can grasp the heart of the most rebellious sinner and draw them to a forgiving God. If the Word has this much power, it also has the power to take care of us through any problem. This meant a lot to those who would read James' words because they were facing such persecution. It should mean as much to us today.

Jas 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

We are to be "*doers*" of the Word. As surely as we are to be swift to hear God's Word we should be swift to obey God's Word. Why refuse, why wait, why hesitate? The Word will not change. What it tells us to do today it will tell us to do tomorrow. Its commandments will not get any easier by our waiting. It will be as difficult tomorrow as it is today. We just as well go ahead and obey it now, quickly, and without hesitation.

How many of us are "*hearers only*"? We talk a lot about what the Word says. But, talking about it is not enough. We should obey it. James will talk about this later (Jam.4:17).

Those who hear but fail to do the Word are "*deceiving*" themselves. We should have a burning desire to learn the Word. But, merely knowing the Word is not enough. With the desire to learn the Word should come a determination to obey it. Our churches, our Christian schools, and our homes are filled with those who are deceived. Learning the Word is vitally important. Being a bible student is a must. However, if we are content to learn only, we are failures indeed. The bible is more than a class book to be mastered, it is an instruction manual to be followed. What good is knowing it if we do not live it? We should not boast of our knowledge of the bible if it is not written on the shoe leather of our lives.

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING RESPONSIVE 1:23-24

Jas 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

The faithful Christian will hear anywhere from 50 to 150 messages preached at their church in a year. Yet, do those messages change us? How do we respond to what God says to us?

The "*glass*" James is speaking about is a mirror. He says the person who hears the Word and does not do what it says is like someone who looks in a mirror.

The word, "*beholding*" means "to observe fully". In other words, he is getting a good look at himself. This word carries with it the idea of discovery. So, the implication is, this man looks in the mirror and discovers something about himself he had not seen before. The mirror shows what he really is.

Notice, this man is seeing his "*face*" in the mirror. He was not looking at his hair or body. Our face is the most revealing part of our body. The expression on our face reveals what is in our hearts. If we are angry, glad, worried, or surprised, it will show on our faces. The reflection tells us exactly what we look like. We may not like what we see but we are seeing ourselves as we are. The Word of God does what the mirror does. It reveals who and what we are. It doesn't hide imperfections. A photographer can remove our imperfections when he finishes our photograph, but a mirror tells it like it is.

What we see in the mirror calls for some type of response. Any time we hear the Word, it calls for a response. We cannot remain neutral about the Word. We need to respond to what the Word tells us about ourselves and correct the problem. If a mirror shows that my hair is out of place, I get a brush and fix it. We should do the same with the imperfections the bible shows us about ourselves.

But, James talks about a person who is a hearer but not a "*doer*" of the Word. Unfortunately, many fall into this category. This world is full of people who know what the bible says, but they do not do what the bible says. Tragically, this is true at the church. So many come to church, sit, listen, and leave without correcting their problems. So many Christians have become hearers but not doers. How many do you know who truly obey the Word?

The time may come when God will quit speaking. Why should He continue to speak when we will not listen to what He has already said?

Jas 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

This man sees his problem, but, he does nothing to fix it. He "*goeth his way*". He simply goes back to living his life and continues to do what he had done before.

The word, "*straightway*" means "soon" or "shortly". It does not take long for him to forget what the Word said to him. The things of life quieten the voice of God.

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING REWARDED 1:25

Jas 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

The bible promises to bless those who obey it. The book of The Revelation promises a blessing to those who keep the things written in it (Rev. 1:3). This promise can be applied to every verse in the bible. God will reward those who obey His Word (Dt. 28:1-2; Ps. 1:1-3; Ps. 8:34; Jer. 7:23; Mal. 3:10; Lk. 11:28; Rev. 1:3).

The word "*looketh*" means to bend over and peer into. It has the idea of leaning in close to the mirror to examine one's reflection. We should look closely into the Word of God. A casual fly-over will do us little good. We should dig deep and allow it to do a deep work in us.

James calls the bible the "*perfect law of liberty*". The terms "*law*" and "*liberty*" are not usually connected. When we think of "*law*" we generally think of being restricted by rules. When we think of "*liberty*" we think of freedom to do as we please. However, as always, the ways of God are not the ways of man. God's way to freedom is by keeping His law. By giving ourselves to His Word, we find what true liberty is all about. To do otherwise is to be bound by Satan, sin, and self. Disobedience to God's law binds us. Sampson discovered this the hard way (Jud. 16:21).

This law of liberty is "*perfect*". This means God's Word is complete. Nothing needs to be added and nothing can be taken away (Ps. 119:89). It means God's Word is correct. It is right all the time. It is without flaw.

God's book is a "*law*". God's Word is like the "law" of the land. Our country is a county of laws. If we live in this country we are bound by these laws. If we chose to violate the laws of the land, we suffer the consequences. The same is true of God's Word. The bible is not a book of suggestions. God fully intends that we obey what is written in His Word.

SCRIPTURE INVOLVES BEING REAL 1:26-27

In verses 26 and 27 James tells us how we can determine if we are a real Christian. If we are "real" our lives will line up with the Word of God.

Jas 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James does much more in this verse than warn us about a loose tongue. He is telling us that a loose tongue may be the symptom of a much deeper problem. It may be a sign of an unconverted heart. He tells us the person who is "real" will talk right.

The word "*religious*" means "ceremonious" or "pious". James talks about those who "*seem*" to be religious. This person has the outward signs of being a Christian. They carry a bible, go to church, and even look the part. Despite these good qualities, this person has a problem that should not be ignored. They "*bridleth not*" their tongue. They fail to control their tongue.

A bridle is a device used to control an animal. The person who fails to control their tongue is not being controlled by God. The tongue reveals what is in the heart. A loose tongue reveals a loose life. Jesus said, "*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (Mt 12:34).

James tells us their failure to bridle their tongue may be an indicator of a more significant problem. He is

saying, the person who has no control of their tongue may not be a true believer. This man's "*religion is vain*". That type of religion is not real. That type of religion is like play money, it seems to work while you are playing the game but it does you no good once the game is over.

This a person who goes to church, dresses right, does right, but they have a loose tongue. They gossip, gripe, groan, complain, insult, and condemn with their words. James says there is a good chance this person is not even saved. There are times when you can tell more about a person's spiritual condition by how they talk, than how they live. The person who's tongue is not controlled by the Spirit has a heart that is not controlled by the Spirit.

A perfect example of this would be the Pharisees. They made long prayers, fasted often, and gave tithes of all they possessed (Mt. 23:23; Jn. 18:28). However, their speech gave them away. They attacked Jesus verbally on many occasions. What they said revealed what they were.

True religion is designed to affect the entire person. The person who allows the Holy Spirit to control their tongue most likely will allow the Spirit to control the rest of their lives. If we are right in our speech it is a good indicator that we are right otherwise. Controlling the tongue means we speak when we should, and what we should. It also means we do not speak when we should not, or what we should not.

An out of control tongue does great harm. This person shows a lack of concern for the will of God or the feelings of others. The Holy Spirit is clearly not in control of this person's life. Solomon's wisdom says, "*Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him*" (Pr 29:20).

James goes so far as to say this person is deceived. He "*deceiveth his own heart*". They actually believe they are right with God. What could be more sad than for someone to think they are saved, when they are not? Jesus said many will stand before Him thinking they were saved, but they were deceived (Mt. 7:21-23).

The uncontrolled tongue does great harm, but a tongue surrendered to the Holy Spirit can accomplish great things. The lost can be saved, the discouraged can be encouraged, the doubter can gain faith, the backslider can be restored, and the Lord can be honored, when a Christian lets the Holy Spirit control their tongue.

Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

In this verse, James tells us the person who is "real" serves as the bible says they should serve.

Verse 26 dealt with our appearance before man. This verse deals with our appearance "*before God*". We should be far more concerned about God's view of our lives than man's view.

Real religion is practical living. It is proven by how we treat others, and how we live for God.

God is more than an evil taskmaster. He is a "*Father*". He is more than the boss to the real Christian. They care for Him and they know He cares for them. There is a fellowship between them.

This religion is "*pure*". This word means, "pure or clean". It has the idea of something that has been dirty or defiled, but it has been made pure. Those with real religion are those who were once impure, but they have been made clean by the blood of the Lamb.

This person is seen as pure and undefiled "*before God*". It is one thing for man to view us as pure, but quite another for God to do so.

Notice what real religion does. It visits. James says real religion is to "*visit*". This speaks volumes. The word "*visit*" means, "to go see". It means much more than just dropping by to say "hello". It carries with it the idea of genuine concern. They visit because they care. There is a connection between the one visiting and the one visited. This word means we "go see" what their needs are. We "go see" what we can do to assist them.

Notice who they visit. They visit the "*fatherless*". We get our English word "orphans" from this word. It means, "without parents". It carries with it the idea of being without comfort.

Also, they visit the "*widows*". This word spoke of one without a husband. Once again, it suggests a person who has no one to care for them.

Real religion visits the fatherless and widows, "*in their affliction*". The word "*affliction*" means, "anguish, burdened, persecuted, or in trouble".

Real religion loves the forgotten and neglected. Real religion listens to those who are hurting and wipes their tears. Real religion puts food in the cabinet, mops floors, mows yards, washes clothes, goes shopping, gives money to pay bills, and fix things that are broken. In other words, real religion does what Jesus would do.

We must remember, James was writing at a time when there was no social security, no IRA's, and no retirement plans. When parents died, the children were left desolate. When the husband died, the widow

was left with nothing. Those who have real religion are those who help those who are most needy of all in society. They help the ones who cannot repay, or return the favor. There is no selfish motive involved.

The kind of religion that pleases God is the kind that goes and gives. When using this yardstick, how do you measure up? Many would measure up fine if James had said true religion is church attendance, dressing right, or even giving tithes. But, when the yardstick of serving others selflessly, most of us fail miserably?

This is truly one of the most neglected aspects of our modern religion. Most of us would miss this aspect of real religion if we were asked. Many of us not only fail in this area of the Christian life, but we shun it completely.

James did not stop at how we should treat the needy. He went further by saying, "*and to keep himself unspotted from the world*". Many social agencies take care of orphans and widows, but real religion is much more than a social agency. We should be giving and godly. It is possible to be caring, but carnal. Real religion is not just helpful, it is holy. Real religion's mission is to change lives. There is more involved than giving a family a meal, our goal should be to give them life. A meal will help for a day, but a witness can help for eternity.

The word "*keep*" means, "to guard". It has been used when referring to a warden who guards his prisoners. If the warden drops his guard, the prisoners will overpower him and escape.

James is saying we should guard ourselves less our old nature overpower us. Once it is set loose, there is no telling what it will do. There is no convict on earth as bad as our old nature. We must guard every aspect of our lives less our flesh take advantage of us.

Every day, there are people who have their lives ruined because they did not guard themselves against their own desires. They are well aware of the damage sin will cause, they know of others who have wrecked their lives, yet, despite all this, they fall because they did not guard themselves against temptation. They refused to heed Peter's warning about the enemy when he said, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pe 5:8).

This teaches us if we live unspotted from the world it will be because we do it intentionally. We do not accidentally live godly lives.

So, James tells us that real religion is one that is concerned only with pleasing God, one that works to help the helpless, and lives godly in an ungodly world.

3. SUBORDINATION IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 2:1-26

Subordination means to put oneself under another. The bible admonishes us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12:3). Jesus certainly had this attitude (Phil. 2:6-8). We should always put others before ourselves.

JAMES TALKS ABOUT RESPECTING THE FLAMBOYANT 2:1-4

James talks about showing favoritism to a man who is obviously rich.

Jas 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

The term "*respect of persons*" means "favoritism". Favoritism is an unfair bias toward one person compared to another. It means we are more kind, compassionate, patient, forgiving, or giving to one person than to another.

James warns us of the futility of trying to judge people only by their appearance. After all, Judas appeared real on the outside and Peter appeared to be a fraud for a period of time.

James lived in a day of extreme partiality. People were categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, and rich or poor. The bible admonishes us to treat everyone the same (Pro. 24:23; Pro. 28:21). One purpose of the cross was to break down these walls that separate mankind (Eph. 2:14-18). The unity of the early church astonished the world. They had never seen anything like it. People of different genders, races, and social standing were being united by the gospel message.

We need to understand something before we look at these verses. James is not implying that it does not matter how we dress. God is obviously concerned about our appearance. How we dress tells us a lot about ourselves. The person who dresses in a worldly manner is demonstrating the fact that they are worldly.

Many use the excuse that God looks at our heart and not our outward appearance. God does look at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) but that certainly does not mean He does not care what the outside looks like. He not

only knows what we wear, but He knows why we wear what we wear. Our appearance, like everything else in our lives, should bring glory to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

We are to surrender ourselves to God in the area of attire (Rom. 6:12-13; 12:2). People will form their opinion of us by how we look and what we wear. The bible says it is an abomination for a man to wear the attire of a woman or a man to wear the attire of a woman (Dt. 22:5). We should dress modestly (Pro. 31:30; 1 Cor. 11:14; 1 Tim. 2:8-10; 1 Pet. 3:2-4). Our attire should not be such as to wrongly attract the opposite sex. Clothes can be attractive without being attracting.

With all that being said, James will tell us that we should not judge a person entirely from their appearance.

James will be putting us to the test. How we treat the poor and lowly tells us a great deal about ourselves. Do you have the love of God in your heart? Are you partial? Will you pass this test?

James talks about our "*faith*". The faith we have in the Lord Jesus Christ should never be associated with favoritism or prejudice. Saying we have the faith of Jesus Christ while at the same time being partial is contradictory. We cannot hold the faith of Jesus Christ in one hand and favoritism in the other.

James adds the words "*the Lord of glory*" in describing Jesus. If the Lord of glory refuses to be a respecter of persons, surely we mortal beings should not.

Jas 2:2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

James uses the church house to find an example of favoritism. What better place to go if we want an example of the Christian life?

The early church did not have buildings to meet in. They met in houses or anywhere else they were able to find. In 2,000 years, the church has moved from humble homes to cathedrals, from brush arbors to worship centers, and from dark rooms to stadiums. I wonder sometimes if we would not be better off to go back to those simple places of worship.

James talks about a rich man coming into the church. We know he is rich because he is wearing a "*gold ring*". A gold ring was a status symbol during the first century and very few people could afford them. You could actually rent rings.

He is also wearing "*goodly apparel*". The word "*goodly*" means, "radiant". Bright clothes were expensive because of the cost of the dye. He is rich and wants everyone to know it.

There also came in a man who is obviously very poor. The word "*poor*" means he is so poor he has to beg. This was probably a common scene in James' day. The early church consisted primarily of common people. Many of them were slaves. The first inner problem of the church was providing for the poor widows (Acts 6:1). Paul talked about the deep poverty of the church (2 Cor. 8:2).

Jas 2:3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

The rich man is ushered to the best seat and treated with great respect. But, the poor man is mistreated and told to sit somewhere out of the way.

The word "*respect*" means, "to gaze at". The rich man is getting a lot of attention. The congregation is in awe of him.

Jas 2:4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

The word, "*partial*" means, "to separate". It means they made a difference between the two men.

The words "*in yourselves*" reveal the fact that favoritism is a heart problem.

We are never more like God than when we show compassion. We are never more unlike God than when we show favoritism.

The modern church flirts with the "*in*" crowd. The movie actor or athlete that professes to know Jesus is put on display even though their lifestyle is questionable. The flamboyant preachers or gospel singers are treated like celebrities, while those with less flash are treated like orphans. Our efforts to fill our churches with the influential has cost us much more than we realize.

The church door should be open to the rich and the poor. We dare not forget, a church is a hospital, not a museum. It is a place where the sick and hurting can come and find help. It is not a place for those who have arrived to display their superiority over others. Too many times, we show favoritism. We go by looks, intelligence, race, financial standing, cars, houses, or wardrobe. God is not impressed with any of this.

We may think favoritism is no big deal, but God says it is "*evil*". We must not miss the point of these verses. Our Lord is wanting us to see how wrong favoritism is.

It would be just as wrong to favor the poor man as it was the rich man. Some have a prejudice towards the rich and that is just as wrong. There would have been nothing wrong with giving a good seat to the rich as long as they would be willing to do the same to the poor.

You may not have an issue with those who are rich, but what about those of a different race. What about those who simply are of a different personality type than you? Favoritism of any sort is displeasing to God.

I am shocked that those James was writing to would have any problem with favoritism. If anyone would have had respect for those less fortunate, you would think it would be those who have had to leave their homes to flee persecution.

A note of interest, I certainly do not believe James was adapting the "come as you are" mentality that is so prevalent in churches today. Neither am I recommending such immodest attire. I believe we should wear the best we have when we go to church. We should respect God and His house by dressing appropriately. We should not try to dictate how a visitor dresses but a church member should go to church, clean, neat, and modestly dressed. I believe to do otherwise grieves God and shows disrespect to His house.

By showing favoritism to the rich they had become "*judges*" with "*evil thoughts*". They were like an evil judge that uses his opinion instead of the law to determine his verdict. To do so would be a violation and disrespect of the law.

James says this type of attitude reveals an evil motive. Their attitude was, what do I get out of this. They were being nice to the rich man because they thought they might receive some benefit from him. They were mistreating the poor man because he offered no help to them. Either attitude is selfish and sinful.

JAMES TALKS ABOUT REPRESENTING THE FATHER 2:5-11

Jas 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

James asks his readers to "*Hearken*". They need to listen intently.

He calls his readers, "*Beloved brethren*". He is writing with compassion, not with harshness or anger. He is speaking the truth in love and his heart is broken over their favoritism.

James rebukes the church for working in a way that is contrary to God's plan. He reminds them of how God has "*chosen the poor*". God offers the same forgiveness, the same heaven, and the same rewards to the poorest person on earth as the richest. God is no respecter of persons (Mt. 22:16; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11).

The entirety of the gospel message deals with how God looks at the heart of man and not his outward appearance.

Jesus gave a parable that reveals the heart of God. In this parable, a king sends his servants to invite both bad and good to a wedding (Mt. 22:9-10). The evidence of this is seen in that the family of God is made up mostly of common folks (1 Cor. 1:26).

When we think of God's attributes, we generally think of His holiness, wisdom, or power, but we seldom think of His impartiality. We should demonstrate these same attributes. The bible has a great deal to say about how God is no respecter of persons and how we should do the same (Dt. 1:17; 10:17; 15:7-10; 16:19; 2 Ch. 19:7; Pro. 24:23; Pro. 28:21; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:10-11; Eph. 6:9; 1 Tim. 5:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:17).

Jesus himself was a perfect example of the common man. His genealogy includes common folks, he was born in the little hamlet of Bethlehem and he lived in Nazareth, a city of common people. Even Jesus' enemies recognized the fact that he was impartial (Mt. 22:16). Jesus lived a common life. He helped the poor and needy. He assisted a woman with a bad reputation (Jn. 4:4-29), healed the lepers (Lk. 17:11-19), and helped an insane man (Mk. 5:1-20).

However, God was just as willing to help those who were rich and influential. Some examples are Abram (Gen. 13:2), Job (Job 1:3), Matthew (Mt. 9:9), Joseph of Arimathaea (Mt. 27:57), Zacchaeus (Lk. 19), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Lydia (Acts 11:13-15), and some in the early church (1 Tim. 6:17).

The fact that there are fewer rich people who are saved does not mean God favors the poor. It simply shows that those who are rich usually are the type who depend upon themselves and feel as though they do not need God. So many times, riches are actually a hindrance to getting saved (Mt. 19:24).

God takes care of the poor. Those who could not afford a lamb could bring a turtledove or a pigeon for their sacrifice (Lev. 14:30). Every seven years the debts of the poor were to be canceled. This was done to make sure they didn't go deeper into poverty. God commanded the corners of the fields to be left unharvested so the poor could glean. A poor person was not to be charged interest for a loan (Lev. 25:35-37).

God blesses those who take care of the poor. Those who give to the poor shall not lack (Pro. 28:27). We are to plead the cause of the poor (Pro. 31:9). God deals with those who mistreat the poor. Those who refuse to consider the poor are called wicked (Pro. 29:7).

When we abuse the poor we are reproaching our God (Pro. 17:5). God will stop hearing our cry when we stop hearing the cry of the poor (Pro. 21:13). God condemned Israel for abusing the poor (Amos 2:6; 4:1; 5:12).

Jas 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

The word "*despised*" means, "to dishonor". They were dishonoring the poor while idolizing the rich. Much of the early church was made up of poor peasants and servants. Since they were at the bottom of the social ladder they were often abused by the upper class and wealthy.

The rich "*oppress you*". Those James was writing to were grievously oppressed by society. Much of this abuse came from those who were rich. Generally, the rich take advantage of the poor.

While they were despising the poor and needy, they were courting the very type of people who mistreated them. The "*judgment seats*" is referring to the judicial systems of their day. They were being taken to the courts of their day for the most frivolous of reasons. The rich were their persecutors, not their friends.

Things have not changed since the day of James. The rich are still admired and envied by the common people. Why are we so concerned about the approval of the very people who despise us? It is a shame when the church chases the very class of people who oppose its message and methods. We should be content with not being accepted by the liberal world.

Just like the Christians during James' day, the modern-day Christians are abused and no one seems to care. We are the one group who is open game. It is considered inappropriate if someone criticizes groups like Muslims, homosexuals, or animal rights people, but most people see nothing wrong with attacking the Christians. Jesus warned us that if they persecuted him, they would persecute his disciples (Jn. 15:20).

Jas 2:7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

The word "*blaspheme*" means, "to speak evil of". The people James is referring to, not only speak evil of the Christians, they speak evil of God Himself. James is asking his readers how they can admire the type of person who abuses the one who saved them.

The early disciples were called "Christians" because they were so much like Christ (Acts 11:26). But, the title of "Christian" was a derogatory one at that time. They hated Christ and those who followed him. The world mistreats us because of the "worthy name" we represent. They do not hate us, they hate the one we represent.

Certainly, all rich people do not abuse Christians. Some love the Lord. But generally, the rich are those who live a life of sin, selfishness, and greed. Because of their love for money, they are prone to use the poor for their own benefit.

Jas 2:8-9 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

God's law is a "*royal law*" because it comes from the King of Glory. The word "*royal*" means, "befitting a king". What type of law would a king have, other than a royal law? God's law is far above man's law.

In this verse, James is saying, God's law said, "*love thy neighbor as thyself*". So, if you are treating the rich man nicely because you are trying to do what God's law says, "*ye do well*". However, if you are being nice to him simply because he is rich, you "*commit sin*" and have broken the law.

God is concerned with more than what we do. He is also concerned about why we do what we do. There is nothing wrong with giving the rich man a good seat. What is wrong is the fact that the rich man was given a good seat simply because he is rich and the poor man is told to sit in the corner just because he is poor.

James makes it abundantly clear, favoritism is "*sin*". The law proves it.

Favoritism is no minor issue. Just think, how did the poor man feel? He saw the rich man being treated like royalty, and himself as a piece of trash. He was a real person. Was he lost? Did he want to come back to that church? Did his mistreatment turn him against Christians and the Christ they represent? We dare not forget, how we treat people does matter. It may mean the difference between heaven and hell for someone.

Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

Every part of the law is important. There are no less important commands. Remember, this is being written to Christians who are suffering tremendously. If they have no excuse to disobey God's law, certainly we don't.

We talk about having selective hearing when someone hears what they want to and ignores what they don't. James is talking about selective obedience. We obey the parts of the bible we like but ignore the parts we don't.

The law is like a window. If you break one portion, you break the whole. If we keep the "*whole law*" yet break "one point" we are guilty of breaking the entire law.

Jas 2:11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The same God who gave the command to not "*commit adultery*" also gave the command to "*not kill*". It is not just what we do that determines our sin, but who we do it against. Like David, we sin against God when we sin (Ps. 51:4). It is His law we violate.

When we sin, we have become a "*transgressor of the law*" no matter what our sin. The fact that there are certain sins we are not guilty of, does not excuse us for what we have done. The convicted thief in prison may look through the bars and talk about how he never murdered anyone, but he is in prison just like the murderer.

JAMES TALKS ABOUT REMEMBERING THE FUTURE 2:12-13

James reminds his readers how they will give account for how they treated others.

Jas 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

When James says, "*So speak ye*" and "*so do*", he means we are supposed to do right and not just talk about doing right.

They will be "*judged by the law of liberty*". We also will be judged by the book we carry. Some act as though they are not concerned with what the bible has to say, but one day they will.

Knowing we will be judged by what is in the pages of the Word of God, should make me think of two things.

One, we need to know what it says. The average Christian knows so little about what the bible says. God said His people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Our opinion does not matter. What Grandma believed isn't important. It is what God says that matters.

Two, we need to do what it says. We can know the bible from cover to cover, but until we do what it says, we have failed miserably.

James calls the bible, "*the law of liberty*". We usually see a law as something that binds. But, not God's law, it liberates. Only by obeying the truths of scripture, we can truly be set free.

Jas 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Those who show "*no mercy*" now, will be judged "*without mercy*" when they stand before God. But, those who show mercy to men now will receive mercy from God later. Our world is full of people who need mercy. We are to grant them mercy now because it is right to do so. But, we should show mercy now because we will need mercy when we stand before the Lord. Those around me need mercy now, I will need mercy then.

Mercy "*rejoiceth against judgment*". In other words, those who show mercy now will be able to stand before the Lord without fear, knowing He will show them mercy. What a liberating thought.

We should look for people we can help instead of people who can help us (Pro. 21:13; 2 Sam. 22:26; Mt. 7:2). Success is not how high I can rise above those around me, but how high I can lift those around me.

JAMES TALKS ABOUT REVEALING THE FAITH 2:14-26

In verses, 14-26 James talks about two kinds of faith. Both are faith, but they have totally different results.

The first type of faith James mentions is "*dead*" faith (v.16,20,26). He calls it dead because it accomplishes nothing. As we will discover, dead faith is simply believing the facts. For instance, someone believes the facts of how Jesus died on the cross. This type of faith will have little, or no, effect on our lives. James will illustrate the futility of dead faith.

The other type of faith James talks about is living faith. Living faith is more than just believing the facts, it is relying on, and trusting in those facts. The person with living faith does not just believe the facts about Jesus dying on the cross, they are trusting Him, and depending on what His work on the cross provided for them. Living faith is genuine faith. It is more than just believing facts, it trusting the Lord for our forgiveness. Genuine faith reveals itself with works.

The key to these verses is found in verse 22 where James says, "*seest thou*". James is talking about what man can see in us. Real faith produces works. Real faith is impossible to miss. It shows on a person. James is about to tell us real faith has shoe leather, it causes us to work.

Before we look at the following verses we need to deal with an issue that has caused a good bit of confusion. Some say James' comments contradict what Paul says about faith. Paul obviously says that faith (salvation) is by faith, without works (Rom. 3:22, 4:6-7, 8:3, 9:16, 11:6; Gal. 2:16, 21, 5:2,4; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9). Yet, James seems to be saying works are necessary for there to be genuine faith (salvation).

This confusion is quickly removed when we recognize the fact that Paul and James are speaking about two totally different views of faith (salvation). Paul was looking at salvation before we get saved. James was looking at salvation after we get saved. Paul and James were comrades fighting together, not enemies opposing each other.

Paul is dealing with the people who believed salvation to be by works. The Jews believed they had to keep the law to find favor with God. They had added so many of their own rules and regulations to the law that it had become a burden no one could carry (Mt. 11:28-30). So, Paul was saying to those people, salvation is by grace and not by works. He tells us works have zero value when it comes to salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).

James, on the other hand, is dealing with the people who believe in a salvation that does not demand anything. He agrees with Paul that salvation is by grace, without works, but he says real faith (salvation) will produce works. He said those who are really saved will have the evidence of good works. He goes so far as to say that if there are no good works, there is no salvation.

Both arguments are correct and needed today. There are those who, as in Paul's day, think they must work their way to heaven. And, there are those who, as in James' day, want a salvation that will take them to heaven but make no demands on their life.

It is interesting to note that both Paul and James used Abraham as an example in their discussion about faith (Rom. 4:1-5 cf. Jam. 2:21-24).

James' Examination

It seems like James has entered a courtroom and is about to examine a person who has professed to have faith. It is as though James is examining this man to determine if his faith is real.

James' Evidence 2:14-20

Jas 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

Here is a man who says "*he hath faith*". He professes to be saved. But, is his faith real?

As in a courtroom, James takes a look at the evidence that is available to examine this man correctly. In a courtroom, the evidence is examined to determine the guilt, or innocence, of the person on trial. Without evidence, there can be no proof. No man can be convicted without evidence of his guilt.

The person James exams shows no evidence of being a real Christian. He says, this man has "*not works*". He displays none of the characteristics of a real Christian.

The word "*profit*" means, "benefit". James is saying without hesitation, a faith that has no works is worthless. He says this type of faith has no profit at all. Faith plus nothing equals nothing.

Real faith always produces "*works*". If the works are absent, it proves there is no real faith. James condemns the profession that does not produce works. When our conduct does not match our claim, people have a right to wonder if our claim is real. When our profession has no proof, it is doubtful that our profession is real. It is what we do, and not what we say that reveals what we really are.

Jesus agreed with James. He said, "*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed*" (Jn. 8:31). He was not saying we have to continue in His Word to stay saved, he was saying if you are saved you will continue in His word. And, if you do not continue in His word, it is proof that you are not really saved. Along the same line of thought, Jesus said, those who enter the kingdom are those who "*doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*" (Mt. 7:21).

James asks, "*can faith save him*". He is actually asking, can "that kind" of faith save him. His point is, that kind of faith, the kind that does not produce works, can not save anyone.

James continues his argument by giving an illustration of dead faith in the next verses.

Jas 2:15-16 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

James gives an example of dead faith by talking about a brother or sister in need. The word "*naked*" does not mean totally without clothes (cf. Mt. 25:36 and Jn. 21:7). It simply means this person has clothes that are old and worn. They do not have sufficient clothes to keep them warm. This person is also "*destitute of*

daily food'. They literally do not have enough food for a day. So, they don't have sufficient clothes to keep them warm or sufficient food to keep them fed.

James also talks about someone who is aware of this person's need. Their response to the needy person is, "*Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*". The phrase, "*Go in peace*" was a common Jewish expression (Ex. 4:18; 1 Sam. 1:17; Mk. 5:34; Acts 16:36). It sounded good but did nothing to assist the needy person.

The words "*ye give them not*" indicate they do nothing to aid the one in need. This person says something like, "I hope you get some help", or, "I hope someone comes along with what you need". But, they do nothing to warm or feed the needy one. What good is that? Empty words do not warm the cold nor feed the hungry.

James gives this illustration to make a point about dead faith. He is saying, dead faith is just like those empty words spoken to the needy person, it does no good. As he said in verse 16, there is no "*profit*".

Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

In verse seventeen James explains what he said in verse sixteen. Faith without works is as useless as someone saying "*Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*" to a needy person. It accomplishes absolutely nothing. Dead faith is believing in our head the facts about Jesus. It is confession without conversion, it is claim without conduct. Spurgeon said, "The grace that does not change my life cannot save my soul".

Jas 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

James assumes the response from the person who claims to have faith. He says to this person, "you say you have faith, well show it to me without your works". The obvious question is, how can you show someone your faith? Merely saying, "I believe" does not prove anything.

But then, James says, "*I will shew thee my faith by my works*". He says, If you want to see whether I believe or not, just watch my life. My faith is demonstrated by how I live. Again, real faith reveals itself with works.

Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

James continues his discussion with the person who claims to have faith. He says, you say you believe in one God, that is great, but so do the demons. The demons have as much faith as the person with dead faith. In fact, the demons probably have more. They believe, "*and tremble*". That means the demons have the kind of faith that causes them fear. Their faith is proven by their fear.

The demons would agree with everything we have in our church statement of faith. They believe in one God. They believe that God created all things and is in control of it right now. They believe that God is holy, compassionate, and longsuffering. They believe that God sent His Son into this world to die for the sin of mankind. They believe all of mankind has sinned and is in need of forgiveness. They even believe the only way of forgiveness is by trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, they are still going to hell. They are going to hell because they have never repented and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is possible to believe the gospel, yet not be saved. Just believing the facts about God does nothing to help the guilty sinner. It is possible to believe all the facts but never act on those facts. It is not believing in our head, it is trusting with our hearts that saves us.

Jas 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James asked his reader, "*wilt thou know*". He is asking them if they are willing to be instructed.

The word "*vain*" means "empty". It speaks of a man who holds an opinion that cannot be defended by facts. James' argument tells us it is not more information we need. Our world has exploded with new information. More information will not help mankind. What mankind needs is to react to the information it already has. This world does not need an educator, it needs a Savior.

The word "*dead*" is like a dead corpse. A faith without works is like a dead corpse, it does nothing.

James' Examples 2:21-26

In the following verses, James gives two examples that demonstrate living faith. The first is Abraham (v. 21), the second is Rahab (v. 25).

Jas 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

James uses Abraham as an example of real faith.

James calls Abraham "*our father*". Remember, James is a Jew and he is writing to Jewish believers. So, Abraham was their father in the physical sense (Jn. 8:37; Rom. 4:1). Abraham was also their father in the religious sense for he was an example of salvation through faith (Lk. 3:34; Rom. 4:18). Abraham has been rightly called, the father of the faithful.

Abraham was justified when he "*offered Isaac*". In other words, by offering Isaac, Abraham showed that he had genuine faith. His faith caused him to obey God.

The bible teaches Abraham was justified before God by his faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:6,11,22,23; Gal. 3:8,11). But he was justified before man by his works.

Like the wind, man cannot see faith, he can only see the evidence of it. But, he can see works. And our works are what proves to man whether we are saved (have real faith) or not. The only way our faith can be seen (by ourselves or others) is by our living a pattern of godliness.

Jas 2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Notice the words, "*Seest thou*". This is the key to James' argument. He is talking about what can be seen by man. Real faith can be seen. Jesus talked about letting our light shine "*That they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Mt. 5:16).

The word, "*wrought*" means, "fellow-worker". It has the idea of two things working together. Abraham's works worked together with his faith to prove he had real faith.

James gives this example to show that the only way Abraham's faith could be seen was for Abraham to do what he did. Abraham claimed to have faith but it was proven when he trusted God and did what God told him to do.

Abraham's faith was revealed when he offered Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22:1-19). Abraham knew God had promised to make a great nation from his seed (Gen. 12:1-3). He also knew Isaac was the son whereby this great nation would come (Gen. 21:12). So, Abraham's trust in God told him that Isaac must live somehow. He believed if God had him to kill Isaac, He would raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19). Now, my friend, that is faith. That is putting your trust completely in God. No wonder why God had James use Abraham as one of the examples of real faith.

The word "*perfect*" means "complete". His works proved he had the right kind of faith.

Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

The "*scripture was fulfilled*" means the bible spoke about how Abraham believed God (Gen. 15:6)

When God saw Abraham's faith, He imputed "*righteousness*" to his account (cf. Rom. 4:3). He does the same thing for the sinner that believes and repents (Rom. 4:6). God not only removes the sin of the believing sinner But, He also gives His righteousness to the believing sinner.

Abraham was called the "*Friend of God*" because he believed God and obeyed Him (2 Chr. 20:7; Isa. 41:8). Those who do the will of God are called His friends (Jn. 15:14-15).

Jas 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Once again, James uses the words, "*Ye see*". His point continues to be what man can see in the lives of those who profess to have real faith.

James uses Rahab for his second example of real faith.

Jas 2:25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Now James uses Rahab as an example of real faith. Abraham and Rahab could not have been more different. He was a Jew, she was a Gentile, he was a man, she was a woman, he was religious, she was a harlot, he was a leader, she was a follower.

When you think about it, what better example of faith than a lady who used to be a very bad sinner. Rahab demonstrates what the grace of God can do in the life of someone who will truly believe.

Like Abraham, we can see that Rahab believed God by what she did (Jos. 2:1-21). Rahab was spared not just because she believed but because what she believed caused her to do what she did.

What better examples could James have given to prove what real faith is? Abraham was willing to kill the son he loved. Rahab literally put her own life, and the lives of her family, into the hands of God. Both had the type of faith that holds nothing from God.

Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James compared dead faith to a dead body. Just like a body without a spirit is dead, the faith that has no works is dead. James is writing to people who demonstrated their faith daily by putting their lives on the line.

Approaching the cross, your works cannot save you. Leaving the cross, if you do not have works you did not really get saved. Whether Old Testament or New Testament, it is the same. No matter what side you

face the cross, it is faith that saves, and the faith that saves produces works.

4. **SPEECH IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT** 3:1-12

In the next few verses, James tells us how important it is to use our words to the glory of God. He did not pull any punches when it comes to how we should use our tongues. Gossip, slander, lying, false accusation, rumors, profanity, blasphemy, complaining, criticizing, abusive words, ridiculing, backbiting, dirty jokes, exaggeration, meddling, or tale-bearing has no place in the family of God.

What did Adolph Hitler and Oliver Greene, have in common. In one way, they used their tongues in an effective manner. Their messages were totally different, but they used the same tool to get their message across, the tongue.

OUR WORDS CAN BE POWERFUL 3:1-8a

Jas 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

Once again, James uses the word "*brethren*". Even though his message is somewhat abrupt, it comes from a heart of love.

James talks about the power of the tongue when it is used to teach, and preach, the Word of God. The tongue is used to teach the Word and lives are conformed by its message. Being a teacher is one of the greatest privileges on earth. We must not take it lightly.

The word "*masters*" means "instructor". James is referring to those who teach, or preach, the Word of God. Jesus was referred to by this title (Mt. 19:16; Lk. 20:21).

When James said, "*Be not many masters*" he was saying there are not many who should be teachers. He is telling his readers they should not be too quick about wanting to teach God's Word. Why would he say such a thing? You would think the more the better when it comes to getting the Word out. Yet, James says there are some who should not teach. He tells us why.

Not everyone should be a teacher because a teacher will be judged more severely. Those who handle the Word of God will "*receive the greater condemnation*". The word "*condemnation*" means "judgment". God holds those who teach, or preach, the Word of God to a higher standard than those who do not (Lk. 12:47). The greater the light, the greater the responsibility, and the greater the accountability. God will hold those who teach and preach accountable for every word they utter (Mt. 12:36).

Not everyone should be a teacher because of the danger of misleading someone. When we think of dangerous jobs we generally think of a policeman, an astronaut, or a surgeon. However, the most dangerous job on earth is a teacher or preacher of God's Word. They deal with eternal matters. They literally have eternal souls in their hands.

Not everyone should be a teacher because God does not use everyone in that manner. Some simply are not teachers or preachers. If God does not put you in it, do not do it.

Not everyone should be a teacher because of the danger of pride. The flesh, and the devil, may tell them they are special because they teach the bible. Pride brings destruction (Pro. 16:18).

Not everyone should be a teacher because of the danger of being wrong. Teaching wrong doctrine is nothing to take lightly. The person who teaches error is misleading everyone who listens. Those who listen are depending on the teachers, or preachers, to know the Word, and tell them what it says. Those who handle the Word literally hold the lives of their listeners in their hands.

Jas 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

James uses a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a fire, as illustrations to make his point about the tongue.

The word "*offend*" means "to err, sin, or to fail".

James' words, "*in many things we offend all*" could be worded to say "we all offend in many ways". We all fail in one way or another.

After establishing the fact that we all fail in many ways, he says, "*If any man offend not in word*". The person who does not fail in the use of their tongue is a unique person indeed.

How we use our tongue probably tells us more about ourselves than any other thing. If we are carnal, it will be revealed by how we talk. Our tongue will tell us about ourselves. Like the doctor who looks at the

tongue to help determine the condition of his patient, God examines our tongue to determine our spiritual condition.

The word "**perfect**" does not mean sinless perfection. It means "complete, or mature". It is used to describe a mature Christian (1 Cor. 2:6; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Col. 4:12; Heb. 5:14). If we want to be a mature Christian, we will need to consider how we use our tongue.

We dare not forget the fact that James is writing to Christians who are suffering severe persecution. Yet, he says to these hurting people, your circumstances do not give you an excuse to speak inappropriately.

The person who is able to control their tongue is able "**to bridle the whole body**". The tongue is the most difficult member of the body to get control of. It is so easy to say something we should not. It is easier to speak that which is sinful than to do that which is sinful. So, the Christian who is in control of their tongue will have a good start to controlling the rest of their old nature.

It seems as though the average Christian overlooks the admonition in this verse. No one would deny the fact that getting drunk is a sin and should be avoided at all costs. However very few see the wrong use of our tongue as something that even needs to be addressed. The Psalmist said, "**I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me**" (Ps. 39:1).

Jas 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

James' first illustration dealing with the power of the tongue is a horses' "**bit**". A bit is small but it gives the rider the power to control the unruly nature of the mighty horse. The bit convinces the horse to "**obey**" the owner. An unbroken, unbridled horse is of little use. A person with an unbridled tongue will do little for God.

The "**whole body**" of the mighty horse is brought under control by the bit. Because of the bit, the horse becomes useful. A tongue surrendered to God can be a mighty tool.

Jas 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

James' second illustration dealing with the power of the tongue is of a rudder on a ship. A ship is a large object and it is often tossed by "**fierce winds**". The captain can direct the ship as he desires, even though it is large and cumbersome, and even though the wind and waves are contrary because he has control of the rudder. If the rudder is under the control of the captain so will the entire ship. If the tongue is under the control of the person, so will his entire nature.

James talks about the size of the ship as being "**so great**". Even during James' day, the ships were fairly large. A ship is mentioned in the book of Acts that held two hundred and seventy-six persons (Acts 27:37). At the time of this writing, the largest cruise ship is over 1187 feet long, has 2,747 staterooms, and is capable of accommodating 5,479 guests at double occupancy. Yet, even this gigantic monstrosity is controlled by a rudder not too different than the ships James had in mind.

This ship is being "**driven of fierce winds**". It isn't just floating in calm waters, it is in a violent storm. The ship not only has itself to deal with, but it has the outside influence of the wind and waves. There is a lot trying to take control of the ship. Yet, the rudder can control the ship and take it wherever the captain determines.

Like the ship, there is so much that tries to control our speech. Our old nature tries to control what we say. The wicked world around us tries to influence us to say things we should not. We need to yield our tongue to the Holy Spirit that we might speak as we should.

Jas 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

James' third illustration dealing with the power of the tongue is of a fire.

The words, "**boasteth great things**" literally means "to talk big". Though the tongue is a "**little member**", it can speak great things. Whether good or evil, the tongue can speak of astounding matters.

A "**little fire**" can cause great damage. One small spark can cause a fire that can burn thousands of acres of forest and hundreds of homes. The misuse of one tongue can start a fire of destruction that can spread throughout a church, destroying everything in its path as it goes. A few words of gossip has the potential to spread like wildfire and destroy many lives. A few words of incorrect doctrine can condemn a person to an eternal hell. Discouraging comments can cause the heart to melt (Josh. 2:11).

What we say, can hurt others (Pro. 26:22). David said the tongue is like an arrow, it not only has the power to wound, but it can wound from a distance (Ps. 64:3). People who would not dream of setting their neighbor's house on fire, think nothing of consuming their reputation with their words. The reputation that takes years to build can be destroyed in seconds by a loose tongue. Whether what we say about them is true or not is not the issue. There are times when it is simply best to leave things unsaid. Generally, the fewer the words, the better (Pro. 17:27). Once spoken, we cannot take back our words. The damage is done (Col. 4:6).

James' illustrations serve not to tell us of the havoc of a horse, a ship, and a fire that are out of control. He wants us to see the blessing these things can be when they are controlled. The mighty horse, when controlled by the bit, is of great value. The ship, when guided by the rudder, is of significant use. And, even the fire, when it is contained can do great things. It can warm a cold child, light a dark path, or cook a meal.

So it is with our tongue. When our tongue, and our nature, are under the control of the Holy Spirit, amazing things can happen. God can use our tongues to comfort the person who is hurting, confront the person who is wrong, or to convict the person who is lost.

Jas 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

The tongue is "**a fire**". Fire cannot be controlled. It may be kept confined to a point, but the fire has a mind of its own and it will do as it pleases. So it is with the tongue that is not controlled.

The tongue can be "**a world of iniquity**". This phrase means "a little world of itself". This makes us think of a city that is known for its wickedness. Like the city of Sodom. It was a world of wickedness. All types of ungodliness lived within its walls. Every evil in this world is contained in an ungodly tongue.

Our tongue can make every sin worse. Anger is sinful, but when we speak in anger the sin is compounded and more damage is done. Fleshly desire is wrong but flirtatious words lead to further sin. Pride displeases God, but bragging makes it worse.

The word, "**defileth**" means "to stain". A loose tongue contaminates the entire body. There is no such thing as having a clean life if we have a dirty tongue.

The tongue can defile "**the whole body**". It does not matter how many good things a person may do, how they talk defines them. A dirty old man with a filthy mouth is known by how he talks, not for what he does. Jesus said, "**That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man**" (Mk. 7:20-21). What people think of us depends so much on how we talk. What we do with our bodies can be undone by how we talk. We may use our hands and feet to do many good things, but an ungodly tongue will make it useless.

The unbridled tongue "**setteth on fire**". It is like a man with a torch walking about starting fires to everything as he goes.

The words "**the course of nature**" mean the "wheel of life". This speaks of the wheel of life that is set in motion at birth and continues to turn throughout our lives. In other words, our tongue can be like a burning wheel that affects everything it comes in contact with. The tongue's influence will continue throughout our entire life. At least part of what James is saying is it does not matter our age, the tongue will be a problem. Some fleshly desires may lessen with age, but there is no age where the battle about what we say will subside.

James tells us where the tongue gets its fire. The ungodly tongue is "**set on fire of hell**". The source of the unbridled tongue is hell. The unbridled tongue gets its energy straight from the devil. The words came from Peter's lips, but the devil had initiated the thoughts that caused the words (Mt. 16:23). It was as though the devil was speaking himself. When we say harmful, hateful, and hurtful things we have allowed our tongues to be used by the devil. May this never be true of us.

Someone has said the unbridled tongue is worse than the fires of hell because the fires of hell torment only the bad and the tongue torments both good and bad.

Jas 3:7-8 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankinde: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

The tongue is not only like an uncontrolled fire, it is like an untamed beast. The strongest animals have been harnessed by man and used for good. The wildest of beasts have been tamed by man. Yet, no one has ever totally tamed their own tongue. About the time we think we have it under control, it will get loose.

No one can tame the tongue because it is an "**unruly evil**". The word "**unruly**" means "unrestrainable". It can not be held down. Like a wild beast, it is ready to break out at any moment.

Notice how James' words verse eight. He says the tongue can no "**man**" tame. He does not say the tongue cannot be tamed. He says man cannot tame it. Man may not be able to, but God can. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible (Mk. 10:27). That includes the taming of our tongues. We will speak kind, loving, gentle, comforting, and spiritual words when we are under the control of the Holy Spirit.

OUR WORDS CAN BE POISONOUS 3:8b

The tongue can be as deadly as poison. The last part of verse eight says the tongue is, "**full of deadly poison**". Like the snake's venom, the tongue is full of death. We are very careful to avoid a poisonous snake because we understand the danger involved. In like fashion, we should be careful about how we speak.

The danger should be ever in our minds. Like poison, the tongue has the power to kill. It can kill the reputation of the one we talk about. It can kill the spirit in the person we criticize. It can kill the love of the person we ridicule.

What we do with what we hear tells us a lot about ourselves. The bible says the wicked man speaks wicked things (Pro. 15:28; 16:27). Some things do not need to be repeated. Staying out of gossip will keep us from trouble (Pr 21:23). Without wood, the fire goes out (Pr 26:20). When you refuse to pass it on, gossip will die. Proverbs also says, "*He that refraineth his lips is wise*" (Pro. 10:19).

The tongue also has the power to kill by what we do not say. Misuse of the tongue is not only what we say, but what we do not say. Neglecting to speak the words of encouragement to the discouraged person may kill their desire to serve God.

OUR WORDS CAN BE PROOF 3:9-12

The tongue is a good litmus test to determine just how spiritual we are. Our words prove what we really are. This is a very telling part of James' comments about our tongue.

He tells us we should use our tongue correctly. But, he does not mean we should just force ourselves to say the right thing. If we are right in our hearts we will automatically say the right thing. If we are right, we will speak right.

Jas 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

The word, "*bless*" means, "to praise". With our tongues, we are able to praise our God. And, we certainly should. However, if we praise the God of creation, we should not speak negatively about that which He created. The fact that man is made after the "*similitude*" of God should keep us from speaking negatively about anyone. If we love God, we should love that which He made.

Jas 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

The same tongue can say holy, and unholy, things. The same tongue can praise God, or blaspheme God. We bless the Lord, and then we curse His people. James is dealing with those who say "*amen*" one minute, and criticize another Christian the next. He says very clearly, "*these things ought not so to be*". It is wrong, it is sinful, and it angers our God.

Jas 3:11-12 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

A tongue speaking holy and unholy things is as unnatural as a fountain giving forth sweet and bitter water, or a fig tree bearing berries. This is not natural and shows there is a problem somewhere.

The land of Israel had springs that produced saltwater (cf. Ex. 15:23) and springs that produced fresh water (2 Kgs. 2:19-21). Some of these springs were fairly close together, but none of the springs produced both salt and fresh water.

The words "*send forth*" means "to gush". Like a gushing stream, the tongue gushes out what is in the heart.

What comes out of the fountain reveals what it is. If the spring has bitter water, it is because its source is bitter. If our words are ungodly, it is because we are ungodly. Every Christian should want a sanctified life. But, every Christian should also want a sanctified tongue.

And so we are reminded how our tongue can tear down. It will destroy a relationship. It can divide a church. It can devastate a family. It can bring about murder and war. However, the tongue can also great things. Our words stir love, produce excitement, comfort, peace, joy, and contentment. Is it any wonder why God is so

interested in our tongue.

5. SKILL IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 3:13-18

James talks about two different types of wisdom in the next six verses. He talks about human (worldly) wisdom (v.13-16), and he also talks about heavenly (godly) wisdom (v.17-18).

These two types of wisdom are contrary to each other because, as we will see, they come from two totally different sources. Heavenly wisdom is contrary to the world because it comes from heaven. God's viewpoint will always be contrary to the world. Heavenly wisdom says there is nothing good in us, so we need God (Rom. 7:18). Heavenly wisdom tells us we must trust God for what we need.

Human wisdom is the opposite of heavenly wisdom. It disputes everything heavenly wisdom says. Human

wisdom says a dog has as much rights as a human. Human wisdom says there are no absolutes so no one has the right to say what is right or wrong. Human wisdom says the power you need to live life lies within you, it just has to be tapped.

Heavenly wisdom is having the skill, or ability, to handle the many circumstances of life in a way that will honor God. James will encourage us to seek that wisdom.

JAMES TALKS ABOUT HUMAN WISDOM 3:13-16

Jas 3:13 Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

James talks about a "*wise man*". Wisdom is knowing how to use the knowledge you have. As I have already mentioned, wisdom is the skill to handle life in a way that will please God. Wisdom is not just what we know, it is knowing how to use what we know.

True wisdom begins with knowing God. The beginning of wisdom is to fear God (Ps. 111:10; Pro. 9:10). Wisdom is knowing God's will and how to do it. The bible says the person who lives as though there is no God, is a fool (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

James also talks about "*knowledge*". Knowledge is having information and knowing the facts. The knowledge we have obtained in life is what governs how we think, act, and react.

Once again we see how James is writing about how real salvation will prove itself by how we live. He said, "*let him shew*". We show others what we are by how we live.

The word, "*conversation*" means "behavior". The person who has wisdom and knowledge will demonstrate it by how they behave. The person who lives life for themselves and ignores God and His Word is not wise.

The truly wise person lives in the spirit of "*meekness*". They do not boast about themselves.

Jas 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

The words, "*bitter envying*" mean, zealous jealousy. It gives the idea that someone is more interested in themselves than others. Human wisdom produces pride, jealousy, envy, and selfishness. It is motivated by self and always asks what is best for me. This type of person is focused only on themselves and does not mind stepping on others to get their way.

The word "*bitter*" is exactly as it sounds. It has the idea of a harsh, self-centered, resentful attitude. This person is proud, selfish, working for their own personal gain, their own happiness, without concern of who it hurts. They do not want anyone even suggesting they are wrong or need to change.

Jealousy is the fear that someone is going to be as good, or better, than us. It includes being resentful of what others have. We do not want them to have it, even though we may not even want it ourselves.

Jealousy is an intolerance to rivalry. We do not want others having what we have. This type of jealousy is displeasing to God (Mk. 7:22; Gal. 5:20; Jam. 4:2).

The word, "*strife*" has the idea of wanting to get ahead no matter what it takes. It is like the politician that will do whatever it takes to get elected.

The problem is in the "*hearts*". If the heart is not right, nothing can be right. From a bad root, comes bad fruit.

James tells them to "*glory not*". The word "*glory*" means to be proud or to boast. The type of person who is always thinking about themselves and doing whatever it takes to get ahead, certainly should not be bragging about it. After all, what do we have to be proud of? What do you have that did not come from God?

Unfortunately, some live totally for themselves and are actually proud of it. They are quick to say things like, "I'm not about to let anyone run over me". James says the person who has this type of attitude controlling their lives should not be bragging about it. It is not something they should be proud of.

James says, "*lie not against the truth*". James tells his readers to be honest. The greatest lie ever told is the lie we tell ourselves about ourselves. There is no need to try to hide the truth. We cannot hide a selfish heart.

We all want our own way. Naturally, when we all get together there is the potential for real problems.

Jas 3:15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

James talks about the source of human wisdom in this verse.

We are, rightly so, very concerned about the source of the water we drink and the food we eat. We should

also be concerned about the source of the beliefs that are controlling our lives.

Human wisdom "*descendeth not from above*". It does not come from God.

James tells us human wisdom is "*earthly*". That means it comes from man. This wisdom is not difficult to find. It is everywhere from the television screen to the billboard, to the computer, to the classroom. The world says we need more education. They say the lack of education is the reason for poverty, crime, and violence. But getting more education has not helped our society. Knowledge certainly is good, but knowledge without God is useless. We are admonished to forsake this type of wisdom (Pro. 9:6).

The world says if you have a problem you should seek the advice of an expert. They are saying the only ones who are capable of handling the tough problems of life are those who have been educated by the experts. So an "expert" trains an "expert" what they learned from an "expert". And most of what they have learned is a bunch of gobbly goop that has its roots in humanism and worldly philosophy.

I am not suggesting for a second that there are not times that we should seek help from those who are trained in dealing with the problems of life. But, I am saying, without hesitation, we should not seek help from someone whose philosophy is not rooted in the Word of God. How can a person who does not even believe the bible offer us any real help?

Human wisdom is "*sepsual*". This means it is of the flesh, or something natural. The flesh naturally desires the things of the world. Human wisdom tells us to do what we want and not worry about the consequences. This wisdom is motivated by self-ambition. It asks "what is best for me, how can I exalt myself, how can I promote myself". This wisdom has no spiritual discernment. It depends on self.

Human wisdom says, "look what I have done". Nebuchadnezzar is a good example of this type of thinking. He said, "*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty*" (Dan. 4:28-30). But, God broke this proud man down (Dan. 4:31-33).

Human wisdom is "*devilish*" means it comes from the devil. The devil is actively at work spreading his propaganda to any and all who will listen.

Human wisdom is intelligence without the Holy Spirit's assistance. Jude tells us about this type of thinking. He said, "*having not the Spirit*", they do what comes naturally" (Jude 19). Paul said, "*In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils*" (1 Tim. 4:1).

Human wisdom teaches that man is his own god, so he can decide what is good or evil. It teaches that within each person is the ability to live life, and therefore, man has no need for any outside assistance, including God. One of the greatest examples of man's wisdom is evolution. From what man calls science has come the biggest fallacy since Lucifer lied to Eve in the garden.

Jas 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Envy and strife are the root, confusion and evil works are the fruit.

The word, "*confusion*" means "instability" or "disorder". Human wisdom claims to have the answer to happiness but it leads us down the path to discontentment and grief. The person depending on human wisdom is unstable because their hearts are unstable. How can there be stability among those who are unstable within themselves? How could there be anything other than confusion when this person is controlled by a flawed belief system? You can not get order out of chaos.

We certainly see the results of human wisdom throughout the world today. This world is in absolute and total chaos. Mankind looks like a bunch of ants running around trying to find their way home. The only difference, the ants know what they are doing and mankind does not have a clue. And, it is getting worse every day.

Every "*evil work*" suggests there is nothing good or godly about it. There is no spiritual value in the wisdom that comes from the world.

Unfortunately, human wisdom has gotten into the church. Some churches are teaching things like self-esteem, self-help, and self-improvement. A self-improvement class would have been little good for the maniac of Gadara (Mk. 5:2-15). Curiosity caused me to do a Google search to determine how popular the subject of self-help has become in the Christian world. Typing the words, "Christian self-help" produced 611,000,000 hits.

Even church services are designed with man in mind. Many churches have become nothing more than a Sunday morning entertainment hour. Everyone wants their favorite song and their favorite preacher, they want the service to be brief and amusing. What has happened to the day when God's people went to church to hear from God? I remember a day when we went to church to worship, to hear from God, and to get something to help us love Him more.

The problem with this type of wisdom is the fact that it leaves God out of the equation. We must ask ourselves, "Where did I come from, who made me, what does this maker desire of me".

JAMES TALKS ABOUT HEAVENLY WISDOM v. 17-18

Jas 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

James starts his description of heavenly wisdom by telling us where it comes from. It is "*from above*". It comes from God. Those who are directed by God's wisdom are controlled by something from beyond this world.

Where does the wisdom that controls your thinking come from? Many people read the labels before they buy because they know where the product comes from makes a vast difference in its quality. So, it should be with the wisdom that we allow to control us.

Heavenly wisdom is not learned in the classroom. That is not to say that God is against classrooms or learning. In fact, He encourages both. But, heavenly wisdom can only come from God. It is not only for a few elite individuals, but it is also available to anyone willing to ask for it. James has already told us to ask for wisdom (Jam. 1:5). We get wisdom by getting on our faces before God.

Heavenly wisdom is "*pure*". James has already told us heavenly wisdom produces a godly life (v. 13). But, the word he uses here is a word that has the idea of being free of impurities. In other words, heavenly wisdom is free of the selfish ambition, jealousy, and arrogance that is found in human wisdom.

James said it is "*first*" pure. The first characteristic of heavenly wisdom is the absence of what human wisdom is. That should not surprise us since it comes from God. It is like the bottled water that claims to have all the contaminants removed. God gives us something that is uncontaminated from the things James mentions in verses fourteen through sixteen.

Heavenly wisdom loves peace. It is "*peaceable*". It promotes peace.

Heavenly wisdom is "*gentle*". This word has the idea of being gentle even during difficult times. It speaks of being courteous, patient, and kind, even when being mistreated. It includes having no hatred or desire for revenge.

Heavenly wisdom is "*easy to be intreated*". This means the person who has heavenly wisdom is not stubborn. It also means they are teachable. They are ready to learn, especially if that which they need to learn is about their own flaws and their need for improvement.

Heavenly wisdom is, "*full of mercy*". The person with heavenly wisdom is more concerned for others than for themselves. It has the idea of caring especially for those who are suffering.

Heavenly wisdom is full of "*good fruits*". This means it produces good works. Paul talks about being filled with fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:11).

Heavenly wisdom is "*without partiality*". The person with heavenly wisdom does not pick and choose who they are kind to, or patient with, or giving towards. This word carries with it the idea of being consistent and not wavering. This person is not kind one minute and unkind the next. They are not caring towards one person and hostile to the next.

Heavenly wisdom is "*without hypocrisy*". It is sincere. It is not phony, or fake. What they do is genuine.

So, the person with heavenly wisdom is seen as a person who has pure behavior that is generated from a godly heart. They practice peace, they have a humble spirit, they refuse to retaliate, they are patient, they are ready to learn and eager to improve, they yield their lives to the will of God, and they treat others fairly no matter who they are. All of this is something that is not put on, it is genuine, it is God working through them.

The person with heavenly wisdom genuinely wants to do that which will please God. They have a deep desire to serve God faithfully, love God totally, and please God consistently. They do not want to hurt or grieve God in any way. No wonder why Jesus would say, "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" (Mt. 5:8).

Heavenly wisdom is marked by humility. The wise man should demonstrate a life with "*meekness of wisdom*".

They are not proud of their knowledge or their accomplishments. Someone has said, "Knowledge is proud she has learned so much, but wisdom is humbled that she knows so little".

Because this wisdom is pure, then it is also, "*peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*". When the root is good, the fruit will be good. When you start with the right ingredients, you do not have to worry about the results.

Heavenly wisdom is "*full of mercy*". Full of mercy means this person wants to help others. When they see someone suffering, they want to help. It wants God's best for others. This person is not content to have

God's best for themselves, they want God's best for everyone.

Jas 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

James concludes his thought about wisdom by writing about the results of wisdom. All our actions are like seeds sown into good soil. Selfishness, ambition, jealousy, and strife have their fruit. And, says James, righteousness also has its fruit.

James tells us about the "*fruit*" of heavenly wisdom. When human wisdom controls us, the result will be confusion and evil works. When heavenly wisdom controls us, the result will be righteousness and peace.

Human wisdom is the rich man who hoards every penny he earns, but heavenly wisdom is the person who gives their last penny to a missionary on a foreign field. Human wisdom is the man who leaves his wife because he found someone younger, but heavenly wisdom is the man who tenderly cares for his wife even though she is dying of cancer. The two wisdoms mark the difference between loving this world and longing for the world to come.

Those who labor to live peaceably shall have peace as their reward. Like the farmer who walks the field sowing his seed. He sows alone. He sows without a lot of fanfare. But, he sows. And, the result of his labor, is a harvest of the seed he has sown.

What we sow will produce a crop. Therefore, the type of seed we sow is vitally important. What type of harvest do you desire? We must sow the type of seed of the harvest we desire. If we want to receive peace, we have to sow peace. If we want to receive love, we must sow love. If we want to receive understanding, we must sow understanding.

As we live our lives, we should learn more and more about how to use the wisdom God has given us. As a Christian learns to love God more and more, we should learn how to use the wisdom God had given us. As we learn how to resist temptation better, we should learn how to use this God-given wisdom better as we live.

There is little wonder why James tells us to ask God for wisdom (Jam. 1:5). We need it and it only comes from God. And so we have discovered, human wisdom is revealed by envy, strife, confusion, and evil works. Heavenly wisdom is revealed by purity, peace, gentleness, mercy, and good works.

6. SUPPLICATION IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 4:1-3

It may not seem like it, to begin with, but James is dealing with prayer in the first three verses of this chapter. He starts by dealing with conflict. He reminds us we are in a world full of conflict and that, as believers, we are not exempt from such. You would expect the church to be the one place on earth where there would be complete harmony. But, James reminds us there are wars and fightings even among God's people. So, let's let James tell us why is there not peace in the pews?

THE STRIFE THAT CAN DIVIDE US 4:1a

Jas 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

There is a vast difference between the last verses of chapter three and the first verses in chapter four. James goes from the fruit of righteousness that is sown in peace, to "*wars and fightings among you*".

James isn't talking to a criminal through the bars of a prison cell. He isn't talking to someone in the red light district. He is talking to God's people. He says these fightings are "*among you*".

James talks about an outward strife.

This refers to external battles. The word, "*wars*" means an actual war. It describes a drawn-out conflict between groups of people. In this type of battle, the welfare of many people is at stake. The word, "*fightings*" means "controversy" or "conflict". It speaks of the smaller differences between a group of people. This word would apply to anything from some children fussing on a playground to an all-out fight between adults.

James uses these two words to describe the condition of the believers he was writing to. It is sad that such words would be needed to describe people who are supposed to know about the love of God.

James also talks about an inward strife.

This refers to internal battles. James talks about battles that "*war in your members*". This war rages on the inside. The reason for every battle ever fought on earth is the fact that there is a battle in the heart of every

person on earth. The same nature that leads a person to a fight in a back alley, can lead a man like Napoleon in an attempt to conquer the world. There is a battle within before there is a battle without.

War is the result of two opposing sides, each wanting what it wants. This is true whether it is two countries fighting for world domination or two children fighting for a lollipop.

This fact is obvious in the life of every believer. There are actually two people in every saved person. There is the old nature and there is new nature inside us all. Paul warned us about the old man (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). So did Peter (1 Pet. 1:4).

That is why James talked about the desires are at "*war in your members*". These two natures are totally opposed to each other. The new nature desires only the things of God. It hungers for communion with the Father, delights in a dedicated life, and rejoices in the work of God. However, our old nature wants to please self, and not the Savior. It wants to fight and not forgive.

It would rather have conflict, than cooperation. It has absolutely no desire for the things of God. It does not want to do right, it despises prayer, hates the Word of God, and resists all effort of the Holy Spirit in His work in us. The old nature cannot be eradicated, or even improved upon. However, we can get victory over it (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:57).

James has this thought in mind when he talks about the "*lusts*" that war in our members. The word, "*lusts*" means, "sensual desire". It can certainly refer to sinful desires, but it can also speak of simply desiring to have our way. It has the idea of wanting that which gives us the most pleasure. In other words, there is within every one of us a person who wants what he wants, he wants it no matter what, and he wants it all the time.

So often, it isn't the people around us that causes conflict, it is the people in us. The old man and the new man are at odds.

Even though there are battles all across this globe, the real problem lies within the heart of every man. This is certainly true for the believer. If we are not at peace with ourselves, we will not be at peace with those we associate with.

Jesus said, "*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness*" (Mk. 7:21-22).

THE STRUGGLE THAT CAN DEFEAT US 4:1b-2a

Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

In the first part of verse one, James establishes the fact the there is a war going on in everyone. He carries that thought one step further by describing the personal battles of the believers he was writing to. He uses the words "*ye*" or "*your*" twelve times in three verses.

James said, "*Ye lust*". Once again, he is talking about our desires, or what we want. This speaks of us desiring something we do not have. James will tell us in the next verse that we need to turn our desires into prayer. If we can not form our desire into a request to God, it is a wrong desire.

He also says, "*and have not*". He is simply saying, we want something we do not have.

He said, "*ye kill*". This speaks to the lengths some will go to get what they want. They were willing to do whatever they had to that they might get what they wanted. James is probably speaking of an attitude of the heart and not literal murder. Jesus talked about committing murder in the heart (Mt. 5:21-27).

Most, if not all, disagreements come because we want what we want. Whether a nation or an individual, the problem is the same. All strife originates from the struggle in the heart of man.

You "*desire to have, and cannot obtain*". They do all they know to do to get what they want, but nothing works. They do not get what they desire.

James says, "*ye fight and war*". They are willing to argue and fuss in an attempt to get what they want.

The body of Christ is supposed to be in unity (Acts 2:1; 4:32; Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 12:26; 1 Pet. 3:8-9). But, sadly James reminds us of how divided we can be at times.

We should all ask ourselves honestly, how do I respond when I do not get what I want. How do I react when I do not get my way? What is my response when people do not do what I want them to? Do you fight, do you argue, do you try to manipulate the circumstances to get what you want?

THE SUPPLICATION THAT CAN DELIVER US 4:2b-3

James goes to the heart of the matter. He says, "*yet ye have not, because ye ask not*". One of the reasons we do not have what we desire is simply because we do not ask for it. James tells his readers they should be praying instead of fussing. They are willing to fuss and fight for what they want, but they do not seem to even think about asking God for it. They were determined to do it their way. But, their way is not working.

Samuel Chadwick said, "Satan dreads nothing but prayer, his one concern is to keep God's people from praying, he fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion, he laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray"

Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James continues by saying, "*ye ask, and receive not*". There are times when we ask but we do not receive. That does not mean God is ignoring us. Neither does it mean He was unable to grant our request.

The word "*amiss*" means "wrongly". It carries with it the idea of being evil, diseased, or sick. There are times when we ask, but we ask for the wrong reasons. We aren't concerned as to whether it is God's will. We simply want our way.

James tells us one of the reasons why we do not receive. He says you ask "*that ye may consume it upon your lusts*". The word "*lusts*" is the same as in verse one.

It refers to our desire, or what we want. In other words, there are times when we ask for selfish reasons.

God is interested, not only in what we are asking for but why we are asking for it. We can ask for good things for bad reasons. If we desire to bring glory to ourselves, the Lord will not hear our requests. Our desire should be to glorify God and edify others.

The Lord knows what will happen if He grants our request. We may be asking for something that would be harmful. Our Father knows what is best for us. When God says "no", it is for our good. What seems good to us may be the worse thing that could ever happen. For some, the worse thing that could happen would be for them to get a raise at work because they would misuse the extra money. An answered prayer can become a curse instead of a blessing.

No matter how often we ask, God will not change. His will does not change. We are wasting our time to ask for something outside of the will of God.

This tells us that prayer is much more than just asking and receiving. God really cares about the attitude of our hearts. Prayer should be the act whereby we reveal a genuine willingness to say, "God, you are right and I am willing to accept your will about this matter".

Prayer is the key to God's treasure house. Prayer is the key to peace (Ps 34:4; Php 4:6-7; 1 Jn 5:14), pleasure (Ps. 55:22), protection (Mt. 26:41), and purity (Jam. 4:8). We will not pray long before the Lord deals with our hidden sin. Prayer is the key to problems (Ps.18:6; Ps. 50:15), patience (Ps. 40:1; Mt. 7:7), power (Mk. 9:28-29; Jam. 5:16), and to people (Mt. 5:44). We should pray for those who are lost, backslidden, hurting, sick, troubled, or afraid.

7. SEPARATION IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 4:4-6

In these verses, James deals with biblical separation. Biblical separation is recognizing how God has called His children out of the world and its influence. Separation is avoiding and abstaining from anything that would not be beneficial for our Christian walk. Separation deals with the fact that God called His children into a life of godliness. He calls us out of the world and into His service.

We are to separate from unbelievers (2 Cor. 5:9-12; 6:14). What fellowship does a Christian have with a sinner? How can light and darkness fellowship together? Of course, that does not mean we are to avoid all unbelievers totally. We must associate with them if we are to win them to Christ. Jesus befriended sinners (Mt. 9:10-13; Lk. 7:34; 19:10). But, Jesus' friendship with sinners was always an attempt to win them.

Biblical separation involves the individual believer but it also involves the church as a whole. The local church should not associate with organizations that are contrary to biblical standards (Rev. 2:14-15). The word "church" means "a called-out assembly". We are called out of the world. No Christian church should join with any organization that denies the Word of God.

In these verses, James will show us the danger of getting too close to the world. The bible clearly teaches that we are to not be friends with the world. We are not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 Jn 2:15-17). Certainly, we are to love the people living in the world (Rom.13:8; 1 Jn.4:7) but we are to hate the worldly system that opposes God.

But, the question arises. What is the world?

The bible refers to the world as the earth and the universe (Heb. 1:2; Jn. 13:1). It uses the word "world" when referring to mankind (Jn. 3:16). But, the bible also views the world as the human system that opposes God (Mt. 18:7; Jn. 15:19; 1 Jn. 2:16, 4:5).

So, the world is the evil system controlled by satan that influences Christians away from the worship, dedication, and love for their God (2 Cor. 4:4). The world is anything that is contrary to God His will, and His Word. That includes anything that is sinful, sensual, or selfish. The world says we should seek for fame, fortune, and fun. It is the far country that calls the prodigal away from the father's house (Lk.15:11-32). The world is that which pleases the natural man. The world is that which will end when our lives end.

John was talking about the world when he talked about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jn.2:16). Every sin on earth can be summed up by those three evils.

These things being said, we may think of the bars, red light districts, and drug houses, when we think of the world. These are certainly a part of the world. But, the world can be found just as surely on Wall Street.

The world loves and approves of, that which God says is sin. The world's philosophy says we are to live as we please with no concern about how it affects others. The world says we are to live for now and not worry about the consequences. But, God tells us to live for eternity with little concern for the present (Mt. 6:33; Jn. 6:27).

JAMES TELLS US SEPARATION SPEAKS OF OUR UNBROKEN FELLOWSHIP 4:4

When it comes to our fellowship with God we are either friend or foe. There is no in between. We should stay close to our Lord and avoid the influence of the world.

Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Undoubtedly, some of those James was writing to had allowed themselves to become allured by the world. James deals harshly with worldliness. He does not offer any gray area. He sees only black or white. God and the world are not friends. We should not love that which is opposed to Him.

We must keep in mind, James was not writing these words on his own, the Holy Spirit moved him to write what he did. God does not play around with sin.

We should remember the difficult circumstances these people were going through (cf. Jam.1:1). If those enduring such difficulty did not have an excuse to live worldly, certainly we don't. Difficult circumstances are never an excuse to live an undedicated life.

We should be like Daniel. He honored God at a time when it was not easy. When most of the other Hebrew men accepted the king's provision, Daniel did not. He refused to defile himself with the king's food (Dan.1:8). His decision was based on the Word of God. In like fashion, we are admonished to abstain from even the appearance of evil (1 Th.5:22). If something even looks like it might be wrong, we should avoid it at all costs.

James calls them "*adulterers and adulteresses*". A person must be married to commit adultery. That tells us James was speaking to saved people. Remember, James is writing to Jewish believers.

The Old Testament pictures Israel as the wife of God (Jer. 3:14; Isa. 54:5). The New Testament believers have that type of relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the marriage relationship, our relationship with God should involve closeness, care, and commitment. God said, allowing sin to run unchecked in our lives is just like us being unfaithful to Him (Mt. 6:24). There is no human relationship on earth greater than the marriage relationship. Therefore, there is no greater betrayal than that of adultery. When we play around with the things of the world, we are breaking the promise we made to our God. We are not just breaking the law, we are breaking the heart of the One who loves us.

When a person gets married they promise to give themselves totally to the one they are marrying. The promise to be committed to our spouse includes a promise to forsake all others. To commit adultery is to break this promise. The person who is guilty of adultery is a person who has allowed someone to come between them and their spouse. That is what happens when a child of God gives in to the world's allurements.

Undoubtedly, some of those James was writing to had allowed this to happen to themselves. How could they have let this happen? God had been good to them. He had forgiven their sin and had taken care of them. How could they mistreat Him so? But, I ask the same question of us. How can we treat our Father as we do? How can we allow the world's enticement to allure us from the God who loves us?

Loving the world cripples our spiritual growth (Lk.6:43) grieves God (Mt.10:37) and pulls us away from His will. So, James warns us about flirting with the world when we belong to Christ. What starts as a little flirting can end up in an all-out affair.

This reminds us of the power of the world. It can seduce the greatest of God's children. Adultery begins with the subtle allurements of another person. That allurements begins so slowly that it is almost undetectable. But, it does not take long for the desire to become overwhelming. So it is with the Christian who allows themselves to be enticed by the world. The world can seduce us away from God's will. No one has power enough to overcome the enticement of the world in their own strength.

James talks about "*friendship with the world*". Friendship is something that is based on the common interests of two parties. They have similar desires, they enjoy spending time together, and they are willing to invest themselves in the other person. The same is true of friendship with the world. The Christian who is a friend of the world is a person who has been drawn into its allurements. They desire the things of the world. They spent time doing that which the world offers. They invest their time and treasure in the things of the world.

Recognizing this, we can see the folly of a Christian who allows this to happen. This type of lifestyle grieves God. In fact, James says such a lifestyle is "*enmity*" with God. The word "*enmity*" means "opposition". God and the world are total opposites.

James continues by saying those who a friend to the world is an "*enemy of God*". The word "*enemy*" means "adversary". The world is the enemy of God. The two are diametrically opposed to each other. There are not two more opposites in the universe than God and the world. God is light, the world is darkness. God is purity, the world is perversion. God is good, the world is bad. God is right, the world is wrong.

How can a child of God justify associating with an enemy of God? James is saying, the worldly Christian is an enemy of God because the world is a tool of God's enemy. These are some pretty harsh words. But, we must remember, loving the world is being a friend to that which is the total opposite of God. There is no in between. We will either be a friend of God and an enemy of the world, or we will be a friend of the world and an enemy of God.

Imagine a quarterback that plays on both teams or a soldier who fights for both sides. Neither side could depend on such a person. And, he could not be truly devoted to either. This ought to show us how serious God is about His children avoiding the world. We may take it lightly, but He does not.

Jesus hung on the cross because of the sin in the world. How can the person who claims to love Jesus love the things that put Him on the cross?

JAMES TELLS US SEPARATION SPEAKS OF OUR UNRELENTING FLESH 4:5

Jas 4:5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

James says, "*Do ye think the scripture saith in vain*". Some reject this phrase because these actual words are not found anywhere in Scripture. But, James meant the truth found here is taught by the rest of the Scripture.

The word, "*vain*" means "to no purpose". James asks his readers if they think God speaks without a purpose. There are times when man talks with no purpose. Some people seem to talk just to hear their own voice. However, unlike man, there is a reason behind every word God speaks.

James is trying to get us to understand the fact that we cannot ignore God. Missing one word of what God says has serious consequences.

There is a great deal of discussion about what James meant in this verse. Some interpret the "*spirit that dwelleth in us*" as the Holy Spirit. Others believe it is speaking of the human spirit that dwells in man.

Those who believe James is referring to the Holy Spirit believe this verse is saying the Holy Spirit who lives in us longs for us to give Him our all. Like the husband that desires that his wife be dedicated to him and no other man. The Holy Spirit desires the Christian to be totally dedicated to God.

Those who accept this view also point out the fact that the word "*lusteth*" found in this verse is used in a positive way in every other instance it is found in the Bible (Rom. 1:11; 2 Cor. 5:2; 9:14; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; 1 Th. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:2).

While these things are true, I believe it is better to see this verse as the spirit of man (the old nature) that dwells in every person. It seems to fit the flow of the context better. James speaks in a negative sense in verse four where he speaks about those who are friends with the world. Then in verse six, he uses the word "*But*" which indicates a change in his subject matter.

This view says James is saying the human spirit within every person desires to control every aspect of

man. Our flesh is like the husband I just mentioned. A husband who desires his wife to love him is normal. But, that desire can go to an extreme. He may be so jealous that he refuses to let his wife have any friends. He may want to totally control her to where she is more of a slave than a wife. And this is a perfect picture of our flesh. The old nature that resides in all of God's children longs to have total control. It is unrelenting. It demands our undivided attention. It always wants to have its way. It longs for attention. It is never satisfied. It always wants more. The bible says the heart of man is full of evil (Ec. 9:3). The soul of the wicked desires evil (Pro. 21:10). And, the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). Paul said, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing*" (Rom. 7:18). This wicked hunger will control us if we allow it.

JAMES TELLS US SEPARATION SPEAKS OF OUR UNENDING FIGHT 4:5b

James says this spirit "*dwelleth*" in us. *Dwelleth* means "to reside". That means our old nature will be in us until we leave this world. At the same time, every child of God has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 15; 1 Cor. 2:12). So, both old and new will live in us until we breathe our last.

Since these two natures are complete opposites, and both desire to control the person they reside in, there is going to be a battle. The child of God has an unending fight on their hands. Paul warned us about this conflict (Gal. 5:17).

We can either let the battle defeat us. Or, we can rely on the grace of God and walk on in victory. In the next verses, James will tell us to do the latter.

There is good news. God has the grace to help us win this battle. James will tell us about this grace in the next verses.

JAMES TELLS US SEPARATION SPEAKS OF OUR UNCHANGEABLE 4:6

Jas 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Looking back at the previous verse, we are reminded how we need the grace to overcome the wicked spirit in us. As we look to the battle with our flesh which James has just written about we can gain encouragement by the truth of this verse. God's grace is available to those who are willing to admit they need it. God is more than willing to give us the grace we need to do His will.

As always, man's only hope is God's grace. And, He "*giveth more grace*". He has what we need, and He is willing to give it to the one who relies on Him.

The word, "*more*" means, "larger" or "greater". This means God always has more grace. His grace never runs out. His grace is ever increasing. His help is inexhaustible. I am so glad my God never has to tell me He cannot help me.

It also means God's grace is always more than the attack of the devil. The devil may tempt us, but God gives grace a little bit greater than the devil's temptation. No matter what we face, God's grace is greater.

It would be wonderful to have a God who has enough for His children. Would it not be a blessing to know when trials come, God has enough to help us? Just to know, no matter what happens, He is able to provide exactly what I need. But, our God is not just a God who has enough, He is a God who has more than enough.

His grace not only never runs out, it never even runs low. Whatever your problem, God's grace is greater. Whatever your need, God's grace is bigger. Whatever your lack, God's grace is more than enough. God's grace is always enough, and more than enough, for what we need.

However, God dispenses His grace carefully. I have often, God is not like the clown in the parade who walks down the street tossing candy to any and all. God is very careful in releasing His grace. Grace is too precious to waste.

First, James tells us who will not receive God's grace.

He says, God "*resisteth the proud*" (cf. Ps.138:6). The proud person need not expect to receive help from God. God gladly gives help to those who will admit they need it. A proud person does not realize, and will not admit, they need God's help.

The word "*resisteth*" means "to oppose". It has the idea of an army setting themselves up for the battle. It means to line up the soldiers to hold off the enemy. Like an army in battle, God opposes the proud person. One thing is certain, we do not want God resisting us. We need His help too much to have Him fighting against us.

The word "*resisteth*" also means that God holds the proud person at arm's length. It is not difficult to understand why God withholds His grace from the person who thinks they do not need it. It would be shocking for Him to do otherwise.

Then, James tells us who will receive God's grace.

God reserves His grace for the "*humble*". It is reserved for those who will admit they need it. The world tells us we should rely on ourselves. It honors those who display a great deal of self-esteem. But, God honors those who are willing to admit how helpless they are.

Nothing pleases God more than for His child to admit how they need Him. Nothing displeases Him more than for one of His children to think they can make it without His help.

Those who are willing to walk humbly with God, and trust His grace, will discover an overcoming power. The grace of God is available to those who are willing to walk in obedience to God.

God will give us the grace to help us to do right. However, this grace must be accepted. Like the medicine prescribed by our doctor, God's grace must be applied for us to enjoy its power.

The person who fails to recognize their need for God's grace has just cut himself off from its benefits. The person who is willing to give the glory to God has opened himself up to heaven's treasure house.

8. SUBMISSION IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 4:7-5:6

James tells us why it is so important that we submit to the Lord. We need to recognize, we are not the king of the mountain. James will let us know, we are not near as valuable as we think we are.

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FATHER 4:7a

We need to submit to God because only He has the power to help us with our daily battles.

Jas 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The word, "*therefore*" makes us look back to the previous verses where James tells us God resists the proud and give grace to the humble.

The word, "*Submit*" means, "to put under". It is used in the military when referring to a lower ranked soldier submitting to the authority of a higher ranked officer. The soldier obeys his officer because simply because the officer has rank on him. We should submit to God because He has authority over us. In case you are wondering, God outranks you. He has the right to tell us what to do, and we have no right to refuse.

Before James says anything about us resisting the devil, he says we are to submit to God. Before the Lord directs our attention to our enemy, He directs our attention toward Himself. His point is until we obey His first command (submit to Him) we just as well not even try to obey His second command (resist the devil). Until we submit to God, we will not have the power we need to resist the devil.

The first step in overcoming our foe is developing a close fellowship with our Father. We will not overcome the devil without God's help. That means I cannot live as I please and have any hope of resisting the devil. God will not give His help to those who know little about Him.

Trying to resist the devil without submitting to God is like trying to fight an enemy without any weapons. Defeat is certain.

We should submit to God humbly, knowing our only hope is that He helps us. We are to do it confidently, knowing He will help us.

James says, Submit "*yourselves*". That means the first step is ours. No one can do it for you. Personal intimacy with God does not just happen, it must be cultivated. That will take time and effort. We are living in a world that says you can have perfect abs in seven minutes a day. Who do they think they are kidding? In like manner, intimacy with God is neither easy, nor quick, but it is worth the effort.

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FOE 4:7b

James tells us to submit to God because we have an enemy that wants to defeat us.

Once we have submitted to God, then we need to, "*Resist the devil*". The word, "*resist*" means, "to set against" or "to oppose". It has the idea of a soldier who gives his all to stand against an attacking enemy. He is not playing games. He is resisting with everything within himself. He knows his life depends on it.

The sooner we learn we are in a real war, the better. Our enemy hates us and the God we represent. He will not give in, give up, or give over. He is like a vicious lion devouring his prey (1 Pet. 5:9). You cannot reason with a lion, you have to kill him.

Resisting the devil involves realizing his evil intentions, recognizing his voice, and refusing his suggestions. We do not have to give in to his temptations (1 Cor. 10:13).

As I said, we should submit to God confidently, knowing He will help us. And, we are to resist the devil by faith, knowing our God is stronger than he is.

James says the devil "*will flee*" from those who truly submit to God and truly resist the devil. Like Jesus, he will leave us for a season (Mt. 4:11). Victory is possible. Who would not like to see the devil run away like a whimpering puppy? Are we not tired of being overcome by our enemy? Who is it among us who does not need this type of victory? Is it not time to claim the victory found in this verse?

Unfortunately, we are prone to reverse these two commands. It is so easy to submit to the devil and resist God. There is no need to expect the promise (will flee) if we do not obey the command (submit and resist).

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FLESH 4:8

James continues to tell us why it is so important to submit to God. We need to submit because our flesh desires the things that are contrary to God's will. The flesh must be dealt with severely.

Jas 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

James admonishes us to "*Draw nigh to God*". Paul talked about desiring a closer fellowship with God (Phil. 3:10). We should never be satisfied with how close we are to God.

The words, "*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*" are an invitation and a promise at the same time. God promises He will draw close to us if we will draw close to Him. This promise removes all of our excuses for not being close to our God. If there is a distance between ourselves and God, we are the ones that moved.

The first step in drawing nigh to God is making sure all our sin is dealt with.

James talks about our hands. He admonishes us to get our hands right.

He says, "*Cleanse your hands*". If we expect to draw nigh to God, we must make sure we come with clean hands (Ps. 24:3-4). It was customary for the Jews to wash their hands before they worshipped (Dt. 21:6; Ps. 26:6). We should make sure our lives are free of sin before we attempt to approach God.

When James speaks about our hands he is talking about what we do. We use our hands to accomplish the necessary tasks of our lives. James admonishes us to cleanse our hands suggests there is something dirty in our lives that needs to be dealt with. The filth of this world attaches itself to us. No sensible person would use their hands without washing them first. God will not use a person who is dirty. Most of us wash our hands several times a day. In like fashion, we should continually cleanse ourselves of the sin that so easily contaminates our lives.

So, James is telling us to examine our lives closely to see if we are doing anything that would displease God. If we are, we should get rid of it immediately.

James calling his readers "*sinners*" is a reflection of their lifestyle. He means to strike to the hearts of those he is writing to. There are times when we need to be shocked into reality. We cannot be helped until we are honest about ourselves. They needed to see themselves as sinful people standing before a holy God.

James talks about our hearts. He admonishes us to get our hearts right.

James continues by saying, "*purify your hearts*". The writer of Hebrews said, "*Let us draw near with a true heart*" (Heb 10:22).

The words, "*Cleanse your hands*" deal with our actions, the words, "*purify your hearts*" deal with our attitudes. Our hands deal with what we do, our hearts deal with what we are. God's will involves both. Our heart is the seat of our motives, desires, and thoughts. Our hands perform that which our heart desires (cf. Mt. 5:28). If we have a hand problem, it is certain we have also a heart problem.

Someone may ask why James speaks of the hands before the heart. I believe he mentions the cleansing of the hands first because that is what is visible. It is not always so easy for us to discern the wrongs of our heart. That which is visible is easier to detect and deal with. By recognizing the need for our hands to be cleansed comes the recognition of our heart issues.

James talks about our heads. He admonishes us to get our thinking right.

James calls his readers, "*double minded*". He admonishes us to get our heads right.

The "*double minded*" person has mixed affection. They try to love God and the world. They try to serve God and self. In the process, they are truly committed to neither. James has already told us the double minded person is unstable (Jam. 1:8). One moment they are trying to please the Lord and do His will, the next they are going after the things of the world and trying to please themselves.

James is pleading for the full surrender of our body and spirit to the Lord. God tells us, "*Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil*" (Isa.1:16).

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FAILURES 4:9-10

James continues to speak to those he called "*adulterers and adulteresses*". They had allowed sin to control their lives. We should submit ourselves to God because we have an old nature that wants to control us.

Jas 4:9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

The word "*afflicted*", means "to be wretched". He says they should be miserable about their spiritual condition.

He tells them to "*mourn, and weep*". This is the opposite of the carefree attitude we hear coming from so many preachers today. The modern message tells us we are supposed to be jubilant all the time. But, James tells us we should be broken about our failures. We certainly should weep when we fail God. Weeping is the outward sign of inner sorrow.

Many times the Bible tells us to unload our burdens. Here, we are told those in sin should be burdened.

The "*laughter*" pictured here is an indication that the person is giving no thought to their sin, to God, or their judgment. Laughter can be a wonderful thing. It is like medicine (Pro. 17:22). There are times when we should laugh (Ecl.3:4). However, there are times when laughter is inappropriate. If we have allowed sin to infiltrate our lives, it is not time to laugh, it is time to mourn.

The words, "*afflicted*", "mourn" and "weep" are words that express the attitude of a person who is truly broken about their sin. This person has been broken by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. They are not laughing, they are mourning. They have seen the horror of their sin. They have recognized how their sin has hurt God and disgraced His people. David had come to this place when he cried, "*I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me*" (Ps. 51:3). Peter was experiencing what this verse describes when he went out and wept bitterly (Mt. 26:75).

When we see ourselves as James describes us, humiliation will come. We will see ourselves as unworthy. We will see ourselves as inadequate. The bible clearly condemns a dependence in self (Ps. 118:8-9; Rom. 7:18; 8:8; Phil. 1:6; 2:3; 3:3).

One of the greatest things that could happen in the churches of America is for all of God's people to be broken again. We need to weep our ways to the cross. And when we do, we will find a tender and loving God, ready to forgive and restore us.

God wants His children to experience this type of heart-wrenching because through this brokenness comes forgiveness and deliverance. We see this fact in the next verse.

Jas 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

The word, "*Humble*" means, "to humiliate" or "bring low". It means we should willingly obey our Lord. It is possible to be obedient without being humble. The Army private obeys his commander but that does not mean he does it willingly. True submission is when we are willing to obey God no matter what He asks of us.

We are to humble ourselves in the "*sight of the Lord*". That reminds us, God is always present, He sees us, He knows us. He sees the real us.

The word, "*lift*" means, "to elevate" or "exalt". This is the message of the second beatitude (Mt. 5:4). God elevates those who humble themselves (Mt. 23:12; Gal. 6:9; 1 Pet. 5:6).

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FAMILY 4:11-12

In the following verse, James calls his readers, "*brethren*". He is reminding them of the fact that Christians are all in the same family. We cannot be right with God if we are not right with each other (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20). Strife brings hurt where there should be harmony (Pro. 18:8; 26:22).

The verses ahead are not saying we should totally ignore sin in the lives of fellow believers. There is a time when we should address the sin in the lives of others (Mt. 7:16, 20; 18:15-17; Acts 20:31; Titus 1:13; 2:15; 3:10). However, this should be done in a humble and compassionate manner, and always with the restoration of the offender as our goal.

Jas 4:11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

James starts this verse with a negative statement. He speaks of something we should not do. In essence, God is saying, "*Thou shalt not*".

The word, "*evil*" means, "to slander" or "to speak against". Slander should not be taken lightly. Slander is an endeavor to lower another in an attempt to elevate oneself. The devil slanders the brethren (Rev.12:10).

James connects speaking evil with judging. The person who speaks evil of a brother, "*judgeth his brother*". The fact that we speak negatively of another indicates we have already judged them. Slander is the outward sin, judging is the inward sin. We spend a great deal of time discussing outward sin, but so often, we neglect the inward sin in our lives. Both are equally wrong.

The person who speaks evil against another Christian is speaking "*evil of the law*" and "*judgeth the law*". In other words, since God's law clearly condemns speaking against a brother, those who do so considers the law unworthy to be kept. It is not our responsibility to decide if the law is right or wrong, it is our responsibility to do what the law says.

The slanderer is "*not a doer of the law, but a judge*". By slandering another when God's law forbids it, we are not only not doing what the law requires, but we have also set ourselves up as a judge.

We should judge ourselves, not others (Lk. 7:28a; 1 Cor. 11:31). The critic that examines himself first will not have time to examine anyone else.

Jas 4:12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

There is "*one lawgiver*". Only God has the right to declare what is right or wrong. If we break God's law, we are doing it against Him. If I think I have the right to go 85 miles an hour on a road that has a 55 miles an hour speed limit, I am putting myself above the authority that established that law.

Only God is able "*to save and to destroy*". Only He can discern who really deserves His mercy and forgiveness, or His judgment.

James says, "*who art thou*". Who are we to judge anyone? We do not have the right, or ability, to judge others. Only God has that right and ability.

Before we move on to the next verses, let's take a look at some guidelines about how to handle slander.

- We should ask ourselves, it is right

Is what I am saying correct? Many things are said, then spread, and they aren't even true.

We are wrong when we judge someone's motives because we do not know their heart. It grieves God when we say things like, "they sing to be recognized" or "he just wants attention".

- We should ask ourselves, it is required

Is it something that needs to be said? Is it necessary? Will it help? We should never reveal anything about someone that would hurt them unless concealing it would hurt worse.

- We should ask ourselves, it is repeated?

Is this another bit of gossip that has made its rounds through the crowd? If so, we need to realize the facts may be inaccurate. Remember the game where one person whispers a phrase to another? By the time it gets to the last person it is totally different than how it began. How many times has your opinion changed when you heard the other side of the story?

- We should ask ourselves, it is retrievable?

I mean by this, once I speak it, can I ever take it back? Of course, we can never retrieve the words we speak. Once spoken, they are gone forever. It's like throwing feathers out of a pillow. Once released, you can never gather them all. We should remember this before we speak.

Speaking evil of another is an indication that we think God is more pleased with us than someone else.

Do not listen to slander or gossip (Pro. 20:19). Do not let your mind become a garbage can. We should believe nothing negative until we have no other choice.

Do not repeat it. A fire goes out when there is no wood is added. I was born in New Bern, North Carolina. Several times during the time we lived there, fires would roar through the pine forests near our home. I remember how they would take bulldozers and cut wide paths through the woods in an attempt to stop the

fires. These paths were called fire breaks. They would stop the fire from spreading and doing more damage. We should be like those fire breaks. When the fire of gossip reaches us, we should make sure it goes no further. Make sure the damage stops at you.

Someone has said, the person who will talk with you will talk about you. This is true more times than not.

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FUTURE 4:13-16

James speaks to those who make plans without considering God and His will. God is not against us planning ahead. He admonished us to consider the ant that plans ahead that it might have what is needed in the future (Pro. 6:6-7). It is wrong to presume we have the power, and the right, to control our lives.

Trying to make plans without God is like trying to play basketball without a basket. What is the point? It is just a lot of activity without a purpose.

Jas 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

The words, "*Go to now*" are virtually the same as our expression, "*Come now*". James is asking his readers to come and have a discussion with him. He is asking us to be reasonable about this subject.

James describes the person who thinks they can do what they want to, when they want to, for how long they want to. Many people have this attitude. We want to do as we please. We want to plan our work and work our plan.

The person James is referring to says, "*We*" will go. They are depending on themselves to accomplish their plans. They made no mention of God.

This person makes plans to go to a certain city and "*continue there a year*". This shows their trust in themselves and their own ability. They are assuming their actions will accomplish their desired goal.

This person goes to "*buy and sell*". They have the details of their plan worked out ahead of time. Once again, they are expecting their actions to bring about certain consequences. They do not even consider the possibility of things not working out as they expect.

This person makes plans to buy and sell, and "*get gain*". Their plans are selfish.

Jas 4:14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

James is quick to point out, "*ye know not*". The problem with living our lives as verse thirteen describes is the fact that we do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. Proverbs says, "*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*" (Pro. 27:1).

Life is like "*a vapour*". Life is like the steam that rises from a pot of boiling water. It "*appeareth for a little time*". The steam lasts for a brief moment and then "*vanisheth away*". Like steam, life can end abruptly and without notice. Since we have so little time on this planet, and our lives could end at any moment, we should allow God to direct our every step.

Jas 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

We "*ought to say*" implies, this is what we ought to do. James is not condemning those who make plans. In fact, the words, "*We ought to say*" refer to a person who is thinking ahead. However, James is condemning those who make plans without including God. Making plans is not wrong, but making plans without God is.

The phrase, "*If the Lord will*" means, if God causes, or allows, something to happen. It acknowledges the fact that God is the One in charge of the circumstances of our lives. Since we have no idea what tomorrow holds, and God does, we should submit our future to Him. Since we have no control over the circumstances that come our way, and God does, we should submit our future to Him.

If "*we shall live*". We don't even know if we are going to be alive tomorrow? That is why James tells us to say, "*If the Lord will*" I will do such and such.

Jas 4:16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

The word "*boastings*" has the idea of a person who proudly does what they intend to do as though no one, including God, can stop them.

So many have this attitude. They are quick to say, "No one has the right to tell me what to do, so I will do as I please". One of the most requested songs for funerals is, "I did it my way". The real problem is this person leaves God out of the equation and boasts about doing so. This type of boasting is "*evil*". It is

ungodly.

- Making plans without God reveals our view of God

This person fails to see God as He is. Since God made us, He has authority over us. He certainly has authority over those who know Him as their Savior. Living submitted to God's will means we recognize His authority over us.

- Making plans without God reveals our view of self

This person believes they have what it takes to handle life and see no need for God. They brag about their accomplishments without even considering the fact that God gave them their intellect, their strength, and even their life. This is the absolute opposite of the humble spirit James recommends in verse fifteen.

The Psalmist wrote about the man who says, "*There is no God*" (Ps. 53:1). We may not be atheist in our beliefs, but we may be atheists in our practice. When we live our lives as though there is no God, we are practical atheists.

- Making plans without God reveals our view of life

The person who lives their lives without including God is the person who believes life is supposed to make them happy. This person thinks they know what is best for themselves.

The truth is, the most important thing in life should be that we please God. God is much more concerned about us being holy than He is about us being happy. The strange thing about it, if we truly walk according to His will, we will be happy. True happiness can only come by living in the center of God's will.

Knowing these things should bring us to the place of total submission to God. He knows the future, we do not. He controls the circumstances, we do not. We are completely at His mercy. That is why there is so much in the bible about us waiting on God (Isa. 8:17; Mic. 2:7; Hos. 12:6; Ps. 25:5; 27:14; 33:20; 37:7; 39:7).

We should get our instructions from Him before we do anything. So many are afraid to submit to God because they think He may send them to Africa as a missionary. The fact is, if God wants you in Africa you will not be happy anywhere except Africa. And, you certainly will not please God anywhere other than Africa.

The God who loves us has the best plan. We should ask ourselves, who can I trust better to run my life, God, or myself. George Truett, once said, "To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge; to find the will of God is the greatest discovery; to do the will of God is the greatest achievement."

Jas 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

James adds this one phrase to warn his readers of the importance of doing what he has been writing. He addresses what is commonly called, sins of omission. This speaks of that which we do not do.

James talks about the person who knows "*to do good*". He knows what God desires and demands. His problem is not ignorance. Most of us know what God expects of us. We know what the bible says.

This person knows what the Lord requires, but he "*doeth it not*". Usually, our problem is not an ignorance problem, it is a doing problem. Not doing what we should is as much sin as doing what we should not do.

Leaving something undone can have dire consequences. What if the surgeon omits one step in your operation or the automobile manufacturer omits your brake system, or the lawyer omits your name in the will? More importantly, what if God had left out one vital step to salvation? What if He stopped giving us our breath, or ceased being patient with us?

As I have mentioned, in this book, James is teaching us how to be right. In this verse, he reminds us being right involves doing right, and not just, not doing wrong.

Our failures are about what we have not done as much as what we have done. Some of the parables Jesus gave were about not doing right. The man did not use his talents (Mt. 25:24-27). The priest, nor the Levite, aided the wounded man (Lk. 10:29-37). Jesus said those who are His brother and sister are those that "*do the will*" of the Father (Mt. 12:50). Paul tells us to not be weary in "*well doing*" (Gal. 6:9). Jesus will judge those who stand before Him by what they did (Mt. 25:45).

James does not tell us why this person failed to do what was right. The fact is, it does not matter what their excuse is. We are never excused from doing right.

Take note of the words, "*it is sin*". That means, not doing right is just as much sin as doing wrong. We should deal with it as any other sin. We should hate it, avoid it, and confess it. God will not bless the individual or church, that is not doing right.

The one place on earth where you should expect to find people doing right is the church. From the pulpit to the pew, we should all do right. We should do right, no matter what. We should do right, no matter when others are doing wrong. We should do right when it is easy or when it is difficult. Bob Jones Sr. said, "Do

right, though the stars fall, do right". It is easy to talk about how we need to be faithful, pray, love, give, or witness. But, we need to do these things, not just talk about them.

Ebenezer Webster, the father of Daniel and Ezekiel Webster, gave his sons a list of chores they were to do before the end of the day. At the end of the day, their father discovered the work was not done. He said, "Ezekiel, what have you been doing all day?" Ezekiel replied, "Nothing, sir." Then Mr. Webster said, "Daniel, what have you been doing?" Daniel answered, "Helping Zeke, sir!"

Unfortunately, most of us would have the same reply about the "chores" our Father has given us to do. Your "don't do" list may be complete. But, what about your "do" list?

The bible has much to say about our failure to not do what we ought.

The bible talks about our failure to believe. The person who refuses to believe on Jesus is condemned already (Jn. 3:18). The one command God gives to the unbeliever is that they believe and repent (Acts 3:19). Failing to believe and repent is the worse sin any person can commit.

The bible talks about our failure to love and do good to others (Mt. 5:43-44; Jn. 13:34; 1 Cor. 13:1-8; 14:1; Eph. 4:2; 5:2; 1 Jn. 4:10-11, 21).

The bible talks about our failure to give (Mk. 12:42-44; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:2-3; 9:6-7).

The bible talks about our failure to be thankful (Ps. 116:17; 140:13; Dan. 2:23; Jn. 6:11; 11:41; 1 Cor. 15:57; Phil. 1:3; Eph. 1:16; 5:20; 1 Th. 1:2; 2:13; 5:8; Rev. 7:12).

The bible talks about our failure to be humble (Ps. 16:18; 21:24; Ecl. 7:8; Isa. 2:12; 5:21; Dan. 4:37; Lk. 18:9; Rom. 12:16; Gal. 6:3; Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; 1 Jn. 2:16).

The bible talks about our failure to labor (Isa. 56:10; Pro. 6:9-11; 14:23; 20:13; 24:33; Rom. 12:11; Gal. 6:9; 1 Th. 4:11; 2 Th. 3:11; Heb. 6:12).

The bible talks about our failure to read the bible (2 Tim. 2:15).

The bible talks about our failure to pray (Jam. 4:2).

The bible talks about our failure to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

WE NEED TO SUBMIT BECAUSE OF OUR FINANCES 5:1-6

James addresses the subject of finances in these verses. How we handle the substance God gives us says a great deal about how spiritually mature we are. Like everything else in our lives, we need to submit ourselves to God in the area of finances.

James speaks here to the wicked wealthy. It is one thing to be wicked. It is quite another to be wealthy and wicked. Riches have the potential to corrupt. The wealthy have the funds to purchase their devices of ungodliness. They usually are the ones who have authority over those who have little.

Some believe James is talking to unbelievers in these verses. The fact is, we are not told if they are lost or saved. Riches can corrupt anyone, whether they are lost or saved. Therefore, the words of warning in these verses can apply to either.

James is not saying it is wrong to be rich. Some of the most godly people in the bible were rich (Job, Job 1:3; Abraham, Gen. 13:2; Isaac, Gen. 26:12; Solomon; 2 Chr. 9:20; David; 1 Chr. 29:28). However, James is saying it is sinful to allow the riches to control our lives.

Money can take away some of the stress involved with life. However, it can cause more stress than it relieves. There is the stress of getting it, the distress of keeping it, the danger of losing it.

Jas 5:1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

The words, "*Go to now*" are similar to our words, "*Come now*" (cf. Jam. 4:13). James is trying to get them, and us, to pay attention and really think about what he is about to say.

The words, "*weep and howl*" have the idea of wailing aloud. James is calling on these rich men to recognize their sinful attitude concerning the things God had given them. The rich are apt to say, "Eat, drink, and be merry". But, James said they should weep.

James tells them to weep and howl because of the "*miseries*" that are coming. Judgment is coming. The words, "*shall come*" tell us the judgment had not yet come. Many think they are getting by with their sin. Judgment may have not yet come, but it will. The words, "*shall come*" tell us the judgment is certain unless they repent.

The judgment James was referring to may have been when Titus the Roman overthrew Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The rich Jews, along with many others, were devastated at that time. Many lost everything they owned.

However, James may have simply been referring to the fact that God would not let their wickedness continue without judging them. The time was coming when they would reap what they had sowed (Gal. 6:7).

They were to "*weep and howl*" now while there was time to repent. James is telling them they should recognize their failure before they suffer the consequences. I am glad God gives us a period of time when we can repent before His judgment comes. Grace always precedes judgment.

Jas 5:2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

James rebukes them, not because they were rich, but because of how they have used their riches.

The word, "*corrupted*" means, "putrefied". Their money, like the manna God gave the people of Israel, was corrupted when it was not used correctly (cf. Ex. 16:20). Everything God gives us is to be used for His glory. Jesus warned about laying up treasures on earth where they could corrupt (Mt. 6:19).

Fine "*garments*" were an indication of great wealth. The fact that their garments were moth-eaten tells us they had so many garments they could not wear them all. The garments that could have been used to clothe the poor had hung around until they were moth-eaten. Allowing them to ruin before they would give them away was a sign of their absolute selfishness.

Jas 5:3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

The word, "*cankered*" has the idea of being tarnished. The "*rust*" of the gold and silver proved the owner had not used it for any good. Their moldy money was proof of their selfish and sinful actions.

Their riches would eat their "*flesh as it were fire*". James pictures their riches as a cancer that eats away at their flesh. That which they loved would end up hurting them. So it is with many of the world's vices. The thrill of the drugs is that which becomes the master of the drug addict. The pleasure of carnal lusts becomes the chains that imprison the degenerate.

Fire is fast and destructive. It consumes everything in its path. God's judgment does the same.

The word "*heaped*" means, "reserve". They had more than they could ever use and still refused to share with others. They had no concern for the needs of others nor for the will of God. Those that determine to be rich fall into all types of trouble (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

What James told his first century readers can be applied to the twenty-first-century believer. It is fine to have money as long as the money does not have you. Someone has said, "It is possible to love money without having it and it is possible to have it without loving it".

The "*last days*" is the period between Jesus' first and second coming. They had lived as though Jesus was never going to return. So many are doing the same in our day.

Jas 5:4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

During James' day, there were day laborers who waited at the market place each morning for someone to come by and hire them for the day. The hours of labor were usually from 6 AM to 6 PM. At the end of the day, they would receive their wage for that day.

God takes care of the poor (Lev. 19:9-10; Pro. 3:27-28). He protected those who labored (Lev. 19:13; Det. 24:14; Jer. 22:13; Amos 8:4-6; Mal. 3:5). They were to be paid each day for the labor of that day (Dt. 24:15). To refuse to do so was a sin because the laborer would not have money to eat the next day.

James tells us how these rich people got their riches. They were guilty, not only of hoarding but of fraud.

The word, "*hire*" means a wage or salary. At least part of the money the rich had hoarded (v. 3) should have been the salary of the ones who had worked their fields. They had mistreated the laborers who had worked to make their fields productive and helped to make them rich.

Their failure to pay their laborers was not because they did not have the money. The word "*fraud*" means, "to deprive". They had so much money it was cankered (v. 3). They certainly had the money to pay the laborers, but they refused to do so. Their failure to pay was not because the workers failed to do their required tasks. The laborers had "*reaped*" the harvest. They refused to pay simply because they were selfish and greedy.

Those who had been blessed by God with riches should have been willing to give to the poor. Yet, they not only did not give, they went so far as to refuse to pay their workers the wages they owed them. Their riches blinded them to the needs of the poor. They were like the rich man who cared nothing for Lazarus as he begged at his gate (Lk. 16:19-21). Many Christians do not seem to mind abusing others financially. Many of the lowest paying businesses claim to be Christian owned and operated.

Their treatment of these laborers revealed the evil in their hearts. They had used their position to take advantage of others.

If they were willing to withhold wages, the most meager of amounts, what else would they be willing to do? If they were willing to withhold wages from those who were in desperate need, what else would they be willing to do? If they would withhold wages from the very ones who made their fields productive, what else would they be willing to do?

James tells them the Lord was not unaware of this situation. The hire of the laborers "*crieth*". James personifies the wages of those who labored for these rich people. James gives an illustration where the money that should have been used to pay the workers is crying out for justice because it is being wrongly used.

All money on earth is a gift that comes from God and should be used in a way that would please Him. Every individual on earth will decide how they use the money they possess. Some choose to use it for the glory of God, while others choose to use it for themselves.

Also, the laborers themselves were crying out for justice. James spoke of the "*cries of them which have reaped*". They were calling to the One who could do something about their situation. We could certainly learn from their example. We need to run to God for the help we need when we face the difficulties of life.

Their cry had been heard by the "*Lord of sabaoth*". The word, "*sabaoth*" means, "hosts" or "armies". This was a name used for God in the Old Testament and means a commander of an army. It signifies the fact that God is the Lord over an innumerable company of angels (Heb. 12:22). It also speaks of God's ability to defend His own and defeat His enemy. The rich thought the poor had no one to defend them but they were about to find out just how wrong they were. The Lord had heard the cry of His people and He was about to take action.

Jas 5:5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

The word "*pleasure*" means "to indulge in luxury". It is a picture of someone pampering themselves. Their entire focus of life had been how to make themselves more comfortable.

The word, "*wanton*" speaks of living in pleasure. They indulged themselves with whatever sinful appetites they desired. They had the money to pay for their fleshly desires and they withheld nothing from themselves. So, they not only were refusing to pay those who labored to help make them rich (v. 4), they were using their riches for every sinful pleasure imaginable. The word "*wanton*" is translated as "*pleasure*" in Paul's writings. He said this type of person is dead while they liveth (1 Tim. 5:6).

They had "*nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter*". This phrase has the idea of an animal gorging themselves not realizing they are being fattened for slaughter. Someone has said, "Oh to be a thin cow when the butcher comes". These wicked rich had indulged in the delicacies of life and they would pay for it. Many act as though they believe the rest of humanity was created for their benefit.

Jas 5:6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

Some believe James is referring to Jesus as the "*just*" in this verse. However, the context seems to indicate James is still referring to the poor and oppressed that he has been writing about in the previous verses.

The word "*condemned*" means, "to pronounce guilty". The rich had taken the poor before the court system of their day (cf. Jam. 2:6). They had used their riches and influence to bring conviction, and even death, to some who were innocent. Their wickedness knew no limit. What began as a love for money had developed into an insensitivity to murder. Ungodliness is never dormant. It always worsens. It is no wonder why the bible says, the person who trusts in riches shall fall (Pro. 11:28).

The poor and oppressed did "*not resist*" the rich. This speaks of obtaining legal defense in the court system. They had neither the will nor the finances, whereby they could defend themselves. Their spirits were broken. Any attempt to resist seemed useless because the rich had used their riches to influence those who sat on the judgment seats. It seemed as though these poor and oppressed people had no where to turn and no one to assist them. Their case truly seemed hopeless.

However, their situation was not hopeless. They did not defend themselves in the courts of man, but they did cry out to the God of heaven and earth. He would hear their case and defend them. We need to rely on God to defend us instead of trying to defend ourselves (Mat. 5:39; 26:52; Jn. 15:15; Rom. 12:19; 1 Pet. 2:21). Our efforts are futile, but His are always successful. They may have found no satisfaction in the courtroom, but they could expect satisfaction from their God.

Stamina is the ability to keep going in spite of difficult circumstances. I am certainly talking about a God given stamina, and not a self produced determination.

James gives three examples of spiritual stamina. He spoke of the farmer (v. 7), the prophets (v. 10), and Job (v. 11).

STAMINA INVOLVES PLANTING FAITHFULLY 5:7-9

James uses the planting of a farmer as an example of the suffering Christian. A farmer plants his seed and patiently waits for the harvest.

Jas 5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

James turns his attention from those who are oppressing to those who are being oppressed. He emphasizes the importance of them being faithful. The days ahead would be very difficult. Nothing was more important for them, and us, than to continue to do what they were supposed to do. The one requirement of God's servant is that they be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

Once again, James calls his readers "*brethren*". He is reminding them of the fact that they are a part of a family and they are not alone.

He admonishes those who are being mistreated to "*Be patient*". This phrase means to be "long-spirited". It is talking about not losing their spirit or allowing themselves to become defeated. It carries with it the idea of looking ahead to the end. We are to look past the trials of the present and focus on the victory ahead.

James gives the example of a farmer to make his point. The "*husbandman*" was a farmer. A farmer is a great example of stamina. His days are long and his labor is hard. He is willing to do what is needed because he longs for his "*precious fruit*". His desire for the harvest makes him willing to endure the difficulties of plowing and planting. He knows the harvest will make the labor worthwhile. It will be worth it in the end.

In like fashion, the life of a dedicated Christian can be difficult. The closer we get to the coming of Christ, the more difficult it will become. Like the farmer, we must keep on doing whatever is necessary in spite of the difficulties. We may face difficult days, but there is a harvest coming. Hearing Jesus say, "Well done" will make it all worthwhile. But, He will not say "Well done" to those who did not labor faithfully.

The farmer "*waiteth*" but that does not mean he is inactive. While he waits, he works. Much of the farmer's work seems to be unsuccessful. He plows, and nothing happens. He plants, and nothing happens. He even sows the seed, and nothing happens. But, the day does come when the plant shoots out of the soil and the farmer knows his labor has not been in vain. Your area of service for the Lord may seem unfruitful at times. Just keep working and waiting. Your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).

The farmer must trust the Lord to provide what is needed for the harvest. He can plow and plant, but only God can send the sun and rain. The "*early*" rains were the rains that came during the time of sowing seed. These were necessary to soften the soil and to germinate the seed. The "*latter*" rains were the rains that came just before the crop was ready for harvest. It was needed to bring the crop to its fullest potential. Since there was very little rain between these times, these two rains were vital for the harvest. The farmer had come to depend on these rains. James tells those who are being oppressed to wait for the Lord as the farmer did his crop. As the Lord gave the rains to produce what the farmers needed for their harvest, He would provide what they needed to make it through their difficult days.

Jas 5:8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

James repeats his admonition that they be "*patient*". Some things are important enough to repeat.

The word, "*stablish*" means, "to set fast". It is talking about not sinking down under the burdens of trials. It also has the idea of looking in one direction. Paul said, "*this one thing I do*" (Phil. 3:13 emphasis added).

James was writing to people who were about to collapse under the pressure of persecution. He encourages them to keep their focus and be faithful. Defeat is certain when we allow our attention to be placed on our circumstances.

Their promise for help was in the "*coming of the Lord*". James tells these hurting Christians to keep waiting. The seed had been sown and the harvest was on the way. It was not time to quit. It was time to be stable. It was time to do right. Just like the farmer patiently waits for the Lord to send the harvest, they were to wait on the Lord's coming. The same God who sent the rain will send His Son.

Their real help was in the promise of the Lord's coming. This is an indication that we can expect troubles in this world until the Lord comes and takes us out. But, until then, we can trust His grace to help us.

The encouragement given to these saints is the same given to all New Testament believers no matter what time period they have lived (Tit. 2:13). Every generation of Christians is called upon to expect the Lord's return and to live accordingly.

James said to the weary saints, as the farmer kept planting and plowing, so should you.

Jas 5:9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

The word, "*grudge*" does not mean what we usually think of. It actually means, "to sigh, murmur, or groan".

James knew the human tendency of grumbling when troubles come. So did Paul (Phil. 2:14). We should resist this tendency at all costs. Grumbling does not solve the problem and actually makes it seem worse than it is. But, more importantly, grumbling dishonors and displeases God. We are complaining about that which God has allowed to come to our lives.

James said, do not grumble "*one against another*". The only thing worse than grumbling when we are facing trouble is grumbling to someone else who is facing the same trouble we are. Misery loves company. The last thing any miserable Christian needs is another miserable Christian talking about how miserable they are.

The Christians James was writing to had been treated terribly. But, God told them to let Him handle the situation. He tells us the same (Lev. 19:18; Dt. 32:35; Pro. 20:22; 24:29; Mt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17-19; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). When we are wronged, our natural tendency is to strike back and get even. We want to hurt them as they hurt us. We need to learn, God can handle our problems better than we ever could. That includes the times when we are wronged by others.

The "*judge standeth before the door*". James reminds these weary saints, the Lord is watching and He is close. But, He is not just the Lord, He is the judge. And, like a judge in a courtroom, He has the authority to hand down the sentence to those who are guilty. He would deal with those who had wronged them so miserably.

However, they needed to realize, this judge would not only deal with those who were wronging them. He would deal with them also. We may be glad for the fact that God will deal with others. But, we dare not forget, the same God who deals with others, will deal with us.

STAMINA INVOLVES PREACHING FAITHFULLY 5:10

James uses the preaching of the prophets as an example of the suffering Christian.

Jas 5:10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and patience.

James uses the Old Testament prophets as an example of having stamina in the middle of trials. The word, "*example*" means, "an exhibit for imitation" or "a pattern". We are to see what they did and do the same.

The word "*affliction*" means "hardship" or "suffering". The prophets had been sorely treated (1 Kg. 18:13; 19:14; 2 Kg. 6:31; Jer. 20:2; 32:2; Amos 7:10; Heb. 11:35-38). Yet, they stood true and kept preaching.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for the prophets was the fact that those they preached to did not give heed to their message. Every preacher has times when it seems as though no one is listening. Like the farmer, the preacher has seasons when it seems dry and barren. But, he must keep working and waiting.

If the prophets remained faithful during the difficulties they endured, certainly we should. They have gone before us and left us a well worn path to follow. May we do so faithfully.

James said to the weary saints, as the farmer kept planting and plowing (v. 7), and the prophet kept preaching, so should you.

STAMINA INVOLVES PERSEVERING FAITHFULLY 5:11

James uses the perseverance of Job as an example for the suffering Christian.

Jas 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

James uses Job as an example of having stamina in the middle of trials. He starts this verse on a positive note. That should tell us that there are positive aspects to our trials.

The word, "*happy*" means "blessed". Jesus said the same (Mt. 5:11-12). Those who are truly happy are those who "*endure*" their trials. True happiness does not come from a trouble-free life. It comes from facing our troubles faithfully, trusting God for His grace, and coming through victoriously. I would rather have

grace than an easy road.

The words, "*Ye have heard*" tell us the story of Job was commonly known. His story has probably touched more lives than any other man. Even in our day, most people know the story of Job. His experience has helped more people than anyone else who has ever lived, other than Jesus.

Job is remembered for his "*patience*". He was stripped of his worldly possessions, his children were suddenly killed, he was tortured by sickness, harassed by his wife, ridiculed by his friends, and tempted by the devil, yet he remained faithful (Job 1:21). He did struggle during his trials (Job 3:1-3, 11, 20; 6:8-10, 24; 7:23). Yet, he stayed faithful. Through it all, he learned more and more about how to be patient. Patience is something we learn as we face one difficulty after another.

The "*end of the Lord*" speaks of the end results. Job did suffer terribly. But his story is also a story of the blessings of victory. He is a perfect example of the blessings of enduring through trials. The end made it all worthwhile (Job 42:10-17).

The word, "*pitiful*" means, "extremely compassionate". This speaks of how the Lord feels about our trials. The words, "*tender mercy*" speak of what He does about it.

Our trials move Him into action. He comes to help us (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; 1 Chr. 21:13; 2 Chr. 30:9; Ps. 25:6; 78:38; 86:5, 15; 103:8, 13; 116:5; 136:1; 145:8; Lam. 3:22; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18; Lk. 6:36).

It may not seem like it while the troubles are at their worse, but the end results show us He never stopped loving us. Our suffering is not a sign of Him not caring.

James said to the weary saints, as the farmer kept planting and plowing (v. 7), and the prophet kept preaching (v. 10), and Job kept persevering, so should you.

Jas 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

Once again, James stresses the fact that how we speak reveals our true spiritual condition (cf. Jam. 1:26; 2:12; 3:2-11; 4:11).

The words, "*above all things*" simply mean to be especially careful at this point. In essence, James is saying, "No matter what happens, do not do this".

The swearing found here is not referring to profanity. It is talking about making a promise or oath. The Jews made differences between binding oaths and non-binding oaths. They considered any oath that did not include the name of God as non-binding. It was simply a way to get away with lying. It was much like our habit of "crossing our fingers behind our back". Jesus warned about this (Mt. 5:34-37).

The word, "*condemnation*" means, "judgment". God will judge those who are guilty. Our trials do not give us an excuse to act or talk wrong.

The words, "*let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay*" mean we should simply say what we mean. If we mean yes, we should say "yes", if we mean no, we should say "no". If we do that, there will be no need to swear. For the Jew, swearing had become a way of emphasizing their speech in an attempt to convince the listener they were speaking the truth. There is no reason for us to emphasize our words if we tell the truth all the time.

Imagine a world where everyone is radically honest. Wouldn't it be nice if you could believe everyone? What if the plumber, mechanic, lawyer, and politician, always told the absolute truth? What if you always told the truth?

10. SUPPORT IS A VITAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 5:13-20

James wants the saints to understand how much they need each other during the difficult days they are facing. We all need the caring support of other believers. God designed mankind in a way to where they need others. That means, no matter who you are, you need someone, and someone needs you. One of the reasons for a church is to provide a place where believers can gather together to support each other (Pro. 17:17; Acts 2:42-47; Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 12:25-27; Gal. 6:22; Col. 3:13; 1 Th. 5:14; Heb. 10:24-25).

SUPPORT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING 5:13a

James gives instructions about how they should assist those who are suffering.

Jas 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

James is writing to those who are "*among*" the believers. Though many of them have been scattered across the county side (Jam. 1:1), they are meeting together in local assemblies. This should show us the importance of the local church.

James addresses those who are "*afflicted*". This refers to suffering of any kind. It could be because of bereavement, disappointment, persecution, or sickness. This seems to be referring to the person who could be overwhelmed by the circumstances of their lives if they do not get some help. Thank the Lord, He is able to help this type of person.

Those who are afflicted are to "*pray*". The remedy for suffering is seeking God's comfort through prayer (Ps. 55:22; Phil. 4:6; Acts 12:5; 1 Pet. 5:7). The God of all comfort tells us to come to Him (2 Cor. 1:3-5). Only God can deal with the source of our sorrow or sickness. Through prayer, God provides help to hurting people. We do not have to give in to our circumstances. We can rush to the One who can give us the grace to endure victoriously. We do not have to be overwhelmed, or overcome, by our battles.

The word, "*merry*" means "cheerful". It literally means, "to have a well mind". James takes us from the pit to the pinnacle, from sadness to shouting, and from gloom to glory. Those who are merry are to "*sing psalms*" (Ps. 30:4; 66:2; 146:2; Acts 16:25). This is referring to songs of praise. Those who are cheerful should recognize who is responsible for their joy. Paul says the same thing (Eph. 5:19-20). We all fall far short of singing praises to our good God.

If anyone on earth has a reason to be cheerful, it is the child of God. We who have experienced God's grace should have joy in our hearts.

Our church services should not be like a funeral procession on the way to the graveyard. We are soldiers marching to Zion in victory. We should act like it.

Notice, James gave the same advice to those who are suffering as those who are merry. Whether sick or singing, we should not hesitate to go to the Lord. We may be quick to pray when we are afflicted. But, we should be just as quick to sing songs when we are merry.

SUPPORT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO ARE SICK 5:14-15

James gives instructions about how they should assist those who are sick.

Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

There is much debate about the next two verses. Some believe it applies only to the time when James lived. There is no reason whatsoever for us to believe that. Some believe James is telling those who are sick to use the medicine available in an effort to get well. If this were the case, it would seem as though he would tell the sick to go to the physicians not the elders of the church. Some believe, as I do, James was telling the sick what to do in order to get well. I believe this procedure applies to our day and should be a part of our local church function. However, we must adhere to the guidelines that are given in these verses.

James is addressing the sick who are "*among*" the church. This tells us of the importance of the church body. A church is more than just a social club where people meet occasionally. A church is a family of brothers and sisters who genuinely care for each other.

The word, "*sick*" means, "to be feeble". The difficult circumstances of their persecution may have made them more prone to sickness.

I personally do not believe James had a common type of sickness in mind. A common cold, a headache, an attack of allergies, will improve whether anyone prays or not. I believe James is speaking about a person who had tried ordinary treatments and experienced no improvement.

Notice, James did not rebuke this person for being sick. Those who tell us a Christian should never be sick are mistaken.

The person who is sick is to "*call for the elders of the church*". Once again, since the elders are called and not the physician, this seems to indicate there is more involved than simply the application of medicine.

The "*elders*" of the church are generally those who are older and mature. This speaks of the spiritual leaders of the church. This would include the pastor, deacons, and other men who had been entrusted with the leadership of the church. These types of men would be expected to be possessors of the faith to believe.

Notice, the sick person is to initiate this procedure. Neither an elder nor anyone else has the right to request this procedure. No scripture speaks of a friend or family member being anointed on behalf of the sick person. This procedure can not be done by proxy. This is unbiblical and should never be done.

Calling on the elders takes a certain amount of humility. The sick person is admitting their need and their

inability to help themselves. They are not to wait and hope the elders hear of their affliction. Unfortunately, there have been occasions when a sick person was needlessly offended when no one came from the church because they were not aware of their sickness.

Notice, the elders are to come to the person who is sick. Nothing is said about the sick being brought to the church, so this is not referring to the modern-day healing services. Of course, there will be times when the sick person is able to go to church and request this procedure while there.

They were to be anointed with "*oil*". This was probably referring to olive oil. Oil was used to signify a work of God. The Old Testament priests were anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7; 31:30). The tabernacle and its furnishings were anointed with oil (Ex. 31:26-29; 40:9-11). Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 25:4-5).

Since oil is used for medical reasons, some believe James is telling them to use this oil as a medicine to assist in the healing. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with using proper medicines, but James said to go to the elders, not physicians. James will tell us later it is the prayer of faith that heals the sick and not the oil (v. 15). If the oil is used in a medicinal manner it would be, at least partly, the means of the healing.

I personally believe the anointing in this procedure is an obvious way of showing how the Holy Spirit is working to touch the sick person. There is nothing mystical or magical about the oil. It is merely a symbol.

The words, "*in the name of the Lord*" mean, by the authority of. A policeman calls to the suspect and says, "Stop in the name of the law". It means he is speaking on behalf of the police department and not simply on his own behalf. The elders are doing this by the authority of heaven and not their own.

This statement assumes that God is present, and pleased, with their obedience to His instructions. It is not a religious rite or sacrament. It simply speaks of the fact they are looking to the Lord to accomplish that which is needed. The elders were simply the instruments through which God worked.

Jas 5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

It is the "*prayer of faith*" that brings about healing. It is not the oil, the elders, nor the one who is sick, who does the healing. It is God, and God alone, who heals. This is one of the reasons that I do not think the oil is used as a medicine as we have already discussed.

I personally believe the term "*prayer of faith*" is speaking of more than just someone believing their prayer could be answered. It is my opinion this is speaking of a special assurance God has given an individual that their request is that which God desires to do. In this case, one, or all, of the elders would have the assurance that it is God's will to heal the person who has come to them. There are times when God assures us that the answer is on the way (Mt. 26:53; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 11:41).

The word "*saved*" speaks of healing. It is the same word translated "whole" where the woman went to Jesus to be healed from her infirmity (Mat. 9:21).

The words, "*if he have committed sins*" should not be taken lightly. I believe this gives us some insight into the procedure James is describing.

First, the word "*if*" means the sickness may not be the result of sin in this person's life. All sickness is certainly not the result of sin (Job 1:8; Jn. 9:2-3; Acts 28:4).

Secondly, the word "*if*" means the sickness may be the result of sin in this person's life. There are times when sickness is the result of sin (Ps. 38:3; 51:8; 107:17; Zeph. 1:17; Micah 6:13).

Thirdly, these words tell us there is more involved with this procedure than merely the healing of a disease. The person who is sick and considering calling the elders should examine their lives to see if there is any unconfessed sin. If God reveals some failure in their lives, they should confess it and forsake it immediately. If we judge ourselves, God will not have to (1 Cor. 11:31).

This is not suggesting the elders are the ones who forgive the sin. Only God can forgive sin (Isa. 43:25; Dan. 9:9; Mk. 2:7).

I believe this is God's instruction about how to deal with our modern day sicknesses. James was written around 62 AD, but he does not instruct those who are sick to find the person with the gift of healing. Instead, he admonishes them to call for the elders and have them pray. It shows us how the gift of healing experienced during the early church days was already on its way out. Even in James' day, some did not receive healing. Lazarus died instead of Jesus coming to heal him (Jn. 11:14). Paul said he left Trophimus in Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach problems (1 Tim. 5:23). He did not tell Timothy to track down the closest person with the gift of healing.

I am not suggesting for a second that God no longer heals. God led James to write these verses because He does still heal. But, He heals in answer to prayer, not through a person with a special gift of healing.

The prayer admonished in these verses does not always guarantee healing. There are times when God uses sickness to accomplish a spiritual work in our lives. Sooner or later, we all will get some type of

disease that will take us out of this world. There will come a day when some type of damage is done to our body that will be irreversible. And, pray or not, we will die.

Since James says their sin shall be forgiven, it is obvious confession is expected.

This experience with sickness can be quite a positive event. Not only is the believer healed, but there is a work done in their lives to draw them closer to God than before.

SUPPORT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO ARE SINNING 5:16-20

James will mention two types of people who are losing the battle with sin. He talks about those who are failing and want to do better (v. 16). And, he talks about those who are failing and seemingly have no desire to do better (vv. 19-20).

He gives instructions about how his readers should support those who are being overcome. We are prone to shun those who have sinned. There are times when we should do just that (Rom. 16:17; 2 Th. 3:6, 20; 2 Tim. 2:16, 3:5; Tit. 3:10; 2 Th. 3:6, 14; 2 Jn. 10-11). However, generally, we should be quick to reach out to those who have failed the Lord (2 Sam. 12:7; Isa. 35:3; Mt. 18:15-16; Gal. 6:1; 2 Th. 3:15; Heb. 3:13). If they ever need a friend, it is when they are in sin. Only Christians support their wounded.

WE NEED TO SUPPORT THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH SELF 5:16-18

James talks about those who are struggling with their flesh and our responsibility to assist them.

Jas 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

This verse can be a continuation of the subject in verse 15 but it also begins a new thought about the importance of supporting those who have been overcome by self and sin.

The word, "**Confess**" means, "to acknowledge" or "to agree". It is like the criminal who admits his guilt and agrees with the charges brought against him. The fact they confess implies they have a desire to change their behavior. Getting right with God always begins with admitting our failure. Until sin is acknowledged no one can live a life that pleases God.

The word, "**faults**" means, "a side-slip". It seems that James is talking about confessing our faults and not our sins. God did not say we are to confess our sins to others. He said we are to confess our faults to others. The practice of going to a priest to confess sin is not biblical. There is one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1).

Confessing my sin is me telling someone I got drunk last night. Confessing my fault is me telling someone I have the desire to drink. There is a world of difference between the two.

This confession is made "**one to another**". It seems to be a private confession of one person to another. There are times when a public confession is needed. I have been present when a public confession was made and have seen it to be very beneficial. When it is of God, can accomplish a great deal. Great revivals have started from such a time of public honesty. However, if it is not of God, it will be more damaging than good. I have also been present when it did great damage. It should be done only after much prayer and soul searching. Even then, the person making the public confession should be very tactful with their words.

Those who confess one to another are also to "**pray one for another**". The obvious reaction of the person hearing the confession is that they pray for the person who has been honest about their struggles. There is more to this confession than just some spiritual gymnastics. It is a process that has victory as a goal.

Let's discuss some details about this subject. James will be talking about confessing our faults one to another. He is talking about more than just a little chat between two people. He is talking about a person opening up and sharing something very personal with another believer.

This confession can be very beneficial to both the one confessing and the one hearing the confession.

It involves confession. The need to confess indicates someone has a spiritual problem. We all have our own personal issues we have to deal with. Confessing is a necessary step to victory. The first step to victory is being honest about our failures.

Hearing the confession should remind the listener of the fact that they have the same nature as the guilty person and are capable of the same failure. They should realize they might be the next one needing to confess. The fact is, we are all flawed. Getting saved did not fix us completely. We are still flawed. We are on dangerous ground when we think we will not fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

It involves caution. We should use caution when considering whether we need to talk to someone about our personal issues. We do not need to talk about every issue we are battling with. We should use caution in deciding who to talk to. It should be someone who is spiritual and someone we can trust.

It involves confidentiality. The matters discussed should be kept confidential.

It involves concern. The person confessing is obviously concerned about their spiritual condition. The person listening should also have a genuine concern for the person confessing to them.

It involves closeness. The conversation should create a closeness between the two. I believe this is one of the goals James has in mind, to begin with. God wants His children to be close.

It involves compassion. The person listening should genuinely care. They should be willing to listen intently, pray earnestly, and assist the guilty person in whatever way they are able. It is not time to be critical or holier than thou.

It involves confrontation. The person listening may need to confront the guilty person about their behavior. This should be done in love. The guilty person should be ready to receive it gladly.

It involves confidence. Realizing someone is praying for them should give them confidence for improvement. They may have been struggling with the problem but victory is possible. James tells them God does hear prayer (5:16b-18).

It involves change. The reason for the confession is that the person might change their behavior. This is not just a casual conversation between friends. This is the first step to a real change.

It involves commitment. The guilty person should commit to doing what it takes to have victory. The listener should commit themselves to assist the one who is struggling. They should begin immediately to hold them up in prayer. They should ask God to give them the grace to overcome their fault.

The person confessing may give the listener permission to hold them accountable. This may include the right to ask if they have given in to temptation. Knowing they could be asked at any moment would certainly help the offender to say "no" to the temptation. We all need some type of accountability.

The confession of their spiritual struggles and the resulting prayer can bring about healing. James writes, "*that ye may be healed*".

James does not say what type of healing he has in mind.

This healing may be the healing of an affliction that has been brought about because of their sin. A sinful lifestyle can cause all sorts of physical issues. Those in sin often neglect the care of their bodies, which causes physical problems. Ceasing their destructive behavior could bring about healing.

This healing may be the healing of an affliction that is because of the chastening hand of God. God will use sickness to correct His children (Ps. 3:7; 51:8; 119:67, 71, 75; 1 Cor. 11:30). God will withdraw the affliction when they cease their sin.

This healing may be the healing of a broken relationship. If the offender is confessing to the one they have offended, their relationship can be healed.

This healing may be the healing of a guilty conscience. A guilty conscience can cause all kinds of physical and emotional problems. David said when he stayed quiet about his sin he made himself miserable (Ps. 32:2). Trying to hide our sin never works (Gen. 3:8-19; Pro. 28:13). Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day. Confession to another can help to bring about a healing of a broken heart.

Sin should never be ignored. Yet, we should deal with sin as discreetly as possible. If we have sinned secretly, we should confess it to God only (1 Jn. 1:9). If we have sinned against someone, we should confess it to God and to the person we sinned against (Mat. 5:23). If we have sinned publicly, we should confess it to God and in public (Mat. 3:5-6; Acts 5:1-4; 8:20; 1 Cor. 5:13; Gal. 2:11).

James concludes this verse by saying, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*". Of course, he is speaking primarily to the ones involved in the confession he describes in this verse. He is assuring both the person confessing and the person listening that God will hear their prayer if they meet the requirements he mentions here.

Even though James is speaking specifically to those involved with the confession, what he says can be applied to all believers.

The words, "*effectual fervent*" are one word in the Greek language. That word means, "to be active", "to work" or "to be mighty in". It speaks of something that works or something that causes a desired result. Prayer does what nothing else can do. Prayer can do whatever God can do.

There is a good bit of discussion about the actual meaning of the words "*effectual fervent*". Some believe James saying we should pray excited and boisterous prayers. The indication is, the Lord will hear us when

we are putting our whole hearts into our prayer. Certainly, this could be what James has in mind. Why should God be moved if we are not moved? Our lukewarm prayers do little to stir God to action.

However, I believe James is saying something quite different. We are never encouraged to "work up" our emotions when we pray or in any other part of our Christian life. Such "excitement" would simply be a work of the flesh and certainly have no influence on our God.

I believe the effectual fervent prayer is a prayer that has been birthed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He places in our heart a burden for a particular need and moves us to pray. When we pray in this fashion, He actually speaks through us as we pray. It is as though God Himself is telling us what to pray, how to pray, and literally praying for us as we yield ourselves to Him.

This type of prayer is possible only when the Christian surrenders themselves to the Holy Spirit and allows Him to have complete access to their mind. This is truly praying in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18). Paul had this type of prayer in mind when he wrote, "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*" (Rom. 8:26).

This is one of the reasons why we should be willing to pray when a particular person crosses our mind. The Holy Spirit reminds us of that person for a reason. They may be in a place of danger at that very moment. They may be in a place where they need assistance from God.

This type of prayer will be fervent even though it may not be loud. It will be emotional but it will not be a worked up emotion. The fervency and emotion will be produced by the working of the Holy Spirit in us. Like the preacher who yields himself to the Holy Spirit, the person who prays in this fashion will become "caught up" with their prayer. They become simply the vessel through which God works to accomplish the need.

Since this prayer is energized by the Holy Spirit we can know we are praying in the Lord's will and will be heard (cf. 1 Jn. 5:14). This type of prayer is the opposite of the "*wavering*" prayer James wrote about earlier (1:6).

There nothing more delightful than to allow the Holy Spirit to have His right of way as we pray and let Him pray through us. I believe we are never any closer to heaven than at that time.

The word, "*righteous*", means "holy". James tells us the type of prayer that should be prayed and the type of person who should pray. The unholy person can know nothing about effectual fervent prayer. They may utter words but they are not words energized by the Holy Spirit. Our prayers are hindered by sin (Ps. 66:18; Pro. 28:9; Isa. 59:2), selfishness (Jam. 4:3), discord (1 Pet. 3:7), doubt (Jam. 1:5-7), or unforgiveness (Mk. 11:25-26).

The word "*righteous*" does not mean without flaw. Elijah was a man of like passions as we are (v. 17). But it does mean the one who walks after the Spirit and not the flesh (Rom. 8:1). This is the type of person who sincerely desires to walk with God and please Him. Their lifestyle is generally a godly one. Our power in prayer depends greatly on our lives. Jesus said, "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*" (Jn 15:7 emphasis added). The "*shall be done*" is dependent on the "*If ye abide in me*".

The word, "*avaieth*" means "to be able". It carries with it the idea of having force. We know about the force of things like wind, rain, and earthquakes. Yet, perhaps the greatest force on earth is that of a small child who makes a request of his father. The father is touched by the need and the trust of his own child. So it is spiritually. Our requests have the power to move the heart of God.

Some see prayer as being like a steam locomotive. The safety valve on the locomotive is designed to release pressure when it gets too much for the engine to withstand. Prayer, like that safety valve, can help us to release the pressure when life gets more difficult than we can handle. Life can be stressful and we need to unload our burdens. God does tell us to cast our care upon Him (Ps. 37:5; 55:22; Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:7).

However, the locomotive is not designed to let off steam, it is designed in a fashion to where the steam moves the engine parts, which moves the train, and gets the job done. Prayer is designed to move the train and get the job done. God has established prayer as a way whereby His work can be done. Through prayer and obedience, we can be a part of this great work.

This type of prayer does not just avail, it avails "*much*". It accomplishes a lot. Prayer accomplishes a great deal (Num. 11:2; 2 Kgs. 6:17; 1 Sam. 1:11; Jer. 33:3; Mk. 5:23; Acts 12:5).

James knew what he was writing about. Tradition tells us James was a great man of prayer. He was called "Camel Knees" because his knees had become so calloused from his extended time in prayer.

Jas 5:17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

James uses Elijah as an illustration to demonstrate the power of prayer. What better way to prove his point than to give an example of a man who accomplished the impossible through prayer.

When searching for an example of prayer, the Lord did not use a superhuman. He used an ordinary "man". Even though Elijah was an ordinary man, he was not ordinary in his walk with God. He was a man of great power. He was a man of great power because he was a man of great prayer. But, he was a great man of power and prayer because he was a man of great purity. He hated the idolatry of his day (1 Kgs. 19:10). Power, prayer, and purity are qualities that are lacking in our day. Perhaps that is why there are so few who know about the power of prayer.

The words, "*like passions*" mean, "similarly affected". That means Elijah was just as capable of being affected by the conflicts of life as any of us. He could have doubted (1 Kg. 17:7), gotten discouraged (1 Kgs. 19:2-4), or gotten proud (1 Kgs. 18:38-40). Yet, in spite of these conflicts, he used prayer as a means whereby he could stay faithful and do great things for God.

Elijah prayed that it "*might not rain*". The Old Testament does not tell us Elijah prayed that it not rain. It does tell us Elijah prophesied about the drought (1 Kg. 17:1), and the rain (1 Kgs. 18:41). We are told about him falling to the ground and putting his face between his knees (1 Kgs. 18:42). But, nothing is said about him praying at that point. James tells us he prayed that it not rain, and it did not rain a drop for "*three years and six months*". Earnest, humble, believing prayer, has great influence with God.

Jas 5:18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Elijah prayed again after the idolatry was dealt with. His second prayer was answered as the first. The rain came again and so did the crops.

Elijah had a faith we all need. There is saving faith that brings a lost sinner to the cross. There is standing faith that helps a believer stay faithful during difficult trials. There is sanctifying faith that helps a believer trust God to live right. And there is a faith that few know about. It is the kind of faith Elijah had. It is supernatural faith. And, that is the kind of faith the Lord wants for each of us.

The fact that Elijah was a man of faith does not mean he had no battle with doubt. He certainly had occasions when he was tempted to doubt. For instance, after he prayed there was no sign of rain. Only after six visits to the sea did his servant see any sign of rain.

And then, it was just a cloud about the size of a man's hand (1 Kg. 18:43-44). Yet, Elijah kept praying until the rain came. The New Testament Christian is told to pray without ceasing (1 Th. 5:17). Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock (Mt. 7:7). It means we are to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking until God answers, or until He tells us to quit asking.

James tells us, the farmer kept plowing and planting (v. 7), the prophets kept preaching (v. 10), Job kept persevering (v. 11), and Elijah kept praying. Earnest and persistent prayer is the key to being stable during difficult days.

WE NEED TO SUPPORT THOSE WHO ARE SATISFIED WITH SIN 5:19-20

Jas 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

In the last verses of his letter, James reminds us of the importance of supporting those who have strayed. Earlier, James wrote of those who may have sin in their lives and admonished the believers to pray for them (5:15). Now, he writes about those who are definitely in sin and encourages us to help them turn from their sin. Sin should never be taken lightly. It destroys the guilty person, discourages those who care about them, and disgraces the name of Christ.

The word "*Brethren*" tells us James is talking to those who are a part of God's family.

The words, "*any of you*" tell us he is talking about those who are in the church. The word, "*of*" found here is the same word translated "*among*" in verses 13 and 14.

The word, "*err*" means, "roam", "wander", or "go astray". It carries with it the idea of being deceived. Those who have strayed from the truth have certainly been deceived by the devil and the flesh. This suggests a gradual moving away from the will of God. It begins so gradually it can barely be noticed.

There is some disagreement as to whether James is talking about a Christian or a lost person. Considering the fact that this person wanders from the truth, I believe he is writing about a Christian. A lost person has never accepted the truth. How can a person wander what that which they have not accepted? He is referring to restoration, not regeneration. He is speaking of wayward saints, not wicked sinners.

This person strays "*from the truth*". We can stray from the truth in at least three ways.

We can stray in principle. I mean by that, a person can stray from what they believe about the bible. Some have changed their minds about things like the inspiration of Scripture, salvation by grace, or eternal security. Once a person loosens their beliefs on biblical doctrine, they will slip morally.

We can stray in position. I mean by that, we can stray from moral standards. Our beliefs determine our actions. Many have wandered from the old fashion convictions they once held. Everything from the way they dress to the type of music they listen to has changed. The biblical standards of a godly lifestyle seem to be less important now. However, the Word of God never changes (Mt. 5:18; 24:35). It still tells us we should have godly standards and avoid the world (Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:12; Col. 3:2; Jam. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15).

We can stray in practice. I mean by that, we can stray by ceasing to practice the behavior associated with the Christian life. This type of person used to be excited about the things of God. They loved spending time in prayer and reading the bible. They loved going to church and hearing from God. They sang in the choir, taught the Sunday School class, received the offerings, and went to the prayer room. They may have been one of the strongest Christians in the church. But, no longer. Their joy of the Lord and their burden for His work is gone. They used to sit in church with a smile, now they sit like zombies, or do not go at all.

The word, "*convert*" means, "to turn back". This is the same word in the Revelation where it says, "*And I turned to see*" (Rev. 1:12 emphasis added). This word can refer to the conversion of a lost person (Mt. 13:15; 18:3; Acts 3:19; 28:27). However, it is not restricted to only those who are lost. It can be used for any significant change in our spiritual lives. Jesus used it when speaking of Peter's restoration (Lk. 22:32).

Considering the difficulty of their day, it is no surprise that some of them would get discouraged and quit. Yet, the difficulties of their day do not give them an excuse to walk away from the will of God.

It is important to realize, James is speaking to those who are still faithful. Once again, we see how God uses human instruments to reach others. When He uses weak and flawed people to help weak and flawed people, He gets the glory.

Jas 5:20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

James writes to those who are still faithful and encourages them to help those who are straying.

The words, "*Let him know*" gives assurance to the person who is concerned about the one who has strayed. There are times when it seems like they are beyond help. James tells us our effort to assist others will not be useless. God can bring them back, and He may use you to do so.

The words, "*he which converteth the sinner*" tell us someone has stepped in and done something to turn the wayward person back to the will of God. The ones who stray can be helped.

The fact that James used the word "*sinner*" has led some to believe he is referring to a lost person. Even though this word is used when talking about a lost person does not mean it cannot be used to refer to a backslidden Christian. A Christian is capable of doing anything a lost person will do.

The one who turns the wanderer may be saving that person "*from death*". It is quite possible that this person was heading to an early grave. John writes about a "*sin unto death*" (1 Jn. 5:16). After David was forgiven for his sin, Nathan said, "*The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die*" (2 Sam. 12:13 emphasis added). The implication is, David would have died had he not confessed and been forgiven. Ananias and Sapphira died a premature death because of their sin (Acts 5:1-10). Paul talked about some who had died because of sin (1 Cor. 11:30). Our heavenly Father chastens His children in an attempt to get them to repent of their sin (Heb. 12:6). But, if they continue to resist His hand of chastening, He will take them out of this world that they might no longer bring a reproach to His name.

The restoration of the straying Christian will "*hide a multitude of sins*". The hiding of sin was a familiar phrase among the Jews (Ps. 32:1; 85:2; Pro. 10:12).

Some teach the hiding of sin is referring to the sin of the one who helped restore the person who strayed. Such teaching is dangerous and leads to other forms of heresy. The hiding of sins refers to the person restored, not the person who helps restore them.

The hiding of sins certainly refers to the forgiveness of the past sins of the one who is restored. But, we should keep in mind the sins they would have committed if they had not been restored. Thank the Lord for the sins that were never committed and the hearts that were never broken because someone cared enough to bring them to restoration.

As previously stated, James is writing to the faithful believers and encouraging them to do what they can to restore those who have strayed from God's will.

- James tells us the faithful saint should be concerned

We should be concerned about those who have strayed from God's will. Someone needs to be concerned enough to do something to help restore them. Abel asked, "*Am I my brother's keeper*" (Gen. 4:9). The answer to his question is "yes". We are our brother's keeper. The word, "*keeper*" is used to describe a shepherd who takes care of his sheep (Gen. 4:2). It is our responsibility to take care of each other (Gal. 6:2).

It is so easy to get aggravated at those who have gone astray. We see the damage they are causing and we feel like just letting them suffer the consequences. Also, there is the inconvenience involved. Praying, visiting, and encouraging them takes time and effort. It is much easier to just discard them.

But, we need to recognize the importance of seeing them restored. Their sinful lifestyle will eventually influence others and cause them to stray. The damage to themselves, the ones who love them, the church, and the cause of Christ is too much to ignore. Anyone can criticize. But, someone needs to care enough to do something (Jn. 13:34).

- James tells us the faithful saint should be calling

Though he does not state it specifically, certainly James would tell us to pray for the straying person. Their only hope is that the God of heaven deals with their hearts. It is a sin to not pray for this person (1 Sa 12:23).

- James tells us the faithful saint should be committed

We need to be committed to being a godly example to those who have strayed. They are watching us. As never before, we need to demonstrate a godly lifestyle in an effort to turn them back to the will of God.

- James tells us the faithful saint should be confronting

We should pray for the wanderer, but there are times when we should do more. There will be times when we are to lovingly confront the one who has wandered. Jesus confronted Peter (Jn. 21:15-19). He confronted him in a direct, but loving, manner.

- James tells us the faithful saint should be compassionate

We need to be ready to forgive and accept the wayward saint when they are restored. Paul told the Corinthians the repentant man had suffered enough and should be received (2 Cor. 2:6-11).

We should forgive others as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13). There may be times when forgiveness does not come easily. We are prone to not forget the past failures of fellow believers. This grieves the heart of God.

- James tells us the faithful saint should be careful

No doubt, James is warning those who are still faithful. We should be careful because any of us could be next to stray. Those who think they are beyond straying are in great danger (1 Cor. 10:12).

The writer of Hebrews admonishes us, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*" (Heb. 2:1 emphasis added). Jesus told the church of Thyatira, "*But that which ye have already hold fast till I come*" (Rev. 2:25 emphasis added).

Robert Robinson knew what he was talking about when he wrote the words, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love". The devil has already set his sights on some of us. You may be his next victim. Instead of making a prayer request at the church service, you will be the one being prayed for.

Every church has people who have strayed. Someone needs to assume the ministry James is speaking of here and go after them. Part of the Soldier's creed says, "I will never leave a fallen comrade". That should be the commitment of every believer. We are in this battle together. We dare not shoot our wounded. We need them too much.

To be used by God to lead a wayward saint home is wonderful. But, how much better would be if that saint never wandered, to begin with. Would it not be better to pray for and encourage that saint before he quit serving God? Why not speak those words of encouragement before their fall? So many of the failures in the average church could be avoided if we all would do our part to encourage others in the family.

For the sins of the wayward saint to be forgiven is wonderful. But, how much better had they never committed those sins in the first place. The restored saint is a marvelous work of God's grace. But, so is the saint who never wandered.

James finishes his letter to the scattered saints. To be honest, it seems to me to end quite abruptly. But, he had written what God said to write, there was no reason to keep writing.

And so, we conclude our thoughts on the book of James. May our walk through this book make a difference in our daily walk with our Lord.

